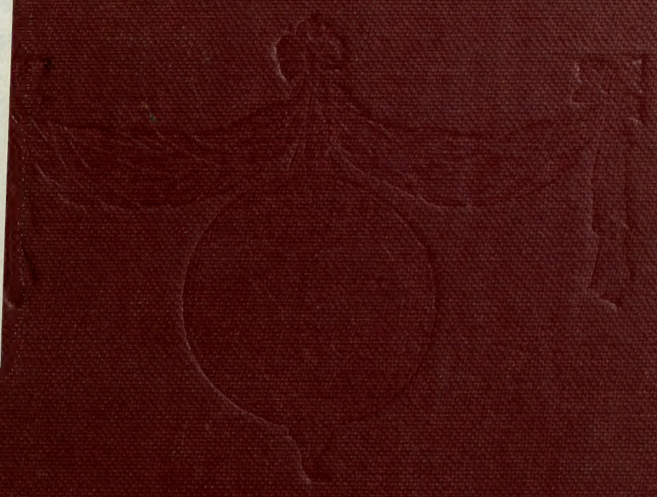
A MUMMER'S TALE



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THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY J. LEWIS MAY AND
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A MUMMER'S TALE

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A MUMMER'S TALE

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
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CHAPTER I

HE scene was an actress's dressing-room at the Odéon.

Félicie Nanteuil, her hair powdered, with blue on her eyelids, rouge on her cheeks and ears, and white on her neck and shoulders, was holding out her foot to Madame Michon, the dresser, who was fitting on a pair of little black slippers with red heels. Dr. Trublet, the physician attached to the theatre, and a friend of the actress's, was resting his bald cranium on a cushion of the divan, his hands folded upon his stomach and his short legs crossed.

"What else, my dear?" he inquired of her.

"Oh, I don't know! Fits of suffocation; giddiness; and, all of a sudden, an agonizing pain, as if I were going to die. That's the worst of all."

"Do you sometimes feel as though you must laugh or cry for no apparent reason, about nothing at all?"

"That I cannot tell you, for in this life one has so many reasons for laughing or crying!"

"Are you subject to attacks of dizziness?"

"No. But, just think, doctor, at night, I see an imaginary cat, under the chairs or the table, gazing at me with fiery eyes!"

"Try not to dream of cats any more," said Madame Michon, "because that's a bad omen. To see a cat is a sign that you'll be betrayed by friends, or deceived by a woman."

"But it is not in my dreams that I see a cat! It's when I'm wide awake!"

Trublet, who was in attendance at the Odéon once a month only, was given to looking in as a friend almost every evening. He was fond of the actresses, delighted in chatting with them, gave them good advice, and listened with delicacy to their confidences. He promised Félicie that he would write her a prescription at once.

"We'll attend to the stomach, my dear child, and you'll see no more cats under the chairs and tables."

Madame Michon was adjusting the actress's stays. The doctor, suddenly gloomy, watched her tugging at the laces.

"Don't scowl," said Félicie. "I am never tight-laced. With my waist I should surely be a fool if I were." And she added, thinking of her

best friend in the theatre, "It's all very well for Fagette, who has no shoulders and no hips; she's simply straight up and down. Michon, you can pull a little tighter still. I know you are no lover of waists, doctor. Nevertheless, I cannot wear swaddling bands like those æsthetic creatures. Just slip your hand into my stays, and you'll see that I don't squeeze myself too tight."

He denied that he was inimical to stays; he only condemned them when too tightly laced. He deplored the fact that women should have no sense of the harmony of line; that they should associate with smallness of the waist an idea of grace and beauty, not realizing that their beauty resided wholly in those modulations through which the body, having displayed the superb expansion of chest and bosom, tapers off gradually below the thorax, to glorify itself in the calm and generous width of the flanks.

"The waist," he said, "the waist, since one has to make use of that hideous word, should be a gradual, imperceptible, gentle transition from one to another of woman's two glories, her bosom and her womb, and you stupidly strangle it, you stave in the thorax, which involves the breasts in its ruin, you flatten your lower ribs, and you plough a horrible furrow above the navel. The negresses, who file their teeth down to a point, and split their lips, in order to insert a wooden disc, disfigure them-

selves in a less barbarous fashion. For, after all, some feminine splendour still remains to a creature who wears rings in the cartilage of her nose, and whose lip is distended by a circular disc of mahogany as big as this pomade pot. But the devastation is complete when woman carries her ravages into the sacred centre of her empire."

Dwelling upon a favourite subject, he enumerated one by one the deformities of the bones and muscles caused by the wearing of stays, in terms now fanciful, now precise, now droll, now lugubrious.

Nanteuil laughed as she listened. She laughed because, being a woman, she felt an inclination to laugh at physical uncomeliness or poverty ; because, referring everything to her own little world of actors and actresses, each and every deformity described by the doctor reminded her of some comrade of the boards, stamping itself on her mind like a caricature. Knowing that she herself had a good figure, she delighted in her own young body as she pictured to herself all these indignities of the flesh. With a ringing laugh she crossed the dressing-room towards the doctor, dragging with her Madame Michon, who was holding on to her stay-laces as though they were reins, with the look of a sorceress being whisked away to a witches' sabbath.

"Don't be afraid!" she said.

And she objected that peasant women, who

never wore stays, had far worse figures than town-bred women.

The doctor bitterly inveighed against the Western civilizations because of their contempt for and ignorance of natural beauty.

Trublet, born within the shadow of Saint-Sulpice, had gone as a young man to practise in Cairo. He brought back from that city a little money, a liver complaint, and a knowledge of the various customs of humanity. When, at a ripe age, he returned to his own country, he rarely strayed from his ancient Rue de Seine, thoroughly enjoying his life, save that it depressed him a trifle to see how little able his contemporaries were to realize the deplorable misunderstandings which for eighteen centuries had kept humanity at cross-purposes with nature.

There was a tap at the door.

"It's only me!" exclaimed a woman's voice in the passage.

Félicie, slipping on her pink petticoat, begged the doctor to open the door.

Enter Madame Doulce, a lady who was allowing her massive person to run to seed, although she had long contrived to hold it together on the boards, compelling it to assume the dignity proper to aristocratic mothers.

"Well, my dear! How-d'ye-do, doctor!

Félicie, you know I am not one to pay compliments. Nevertheless, I saw you the day before yesterday, and I assure you that in the second of *La Mère confidente* you put in some excellent touches, which are far from easy to bring off."

Nanteuil, with smiling eyes, waited—as is always the case when one has received a compliment—for another.

Madame Doulce, thus invited by Nanteuil's silence, murmured some additional words of praise :

" . . . excellent touches, genuinely individual business ! "

" You really think so, Madame Doulce ? Glad to hear it, for I don't feel the part. And then that great Perrin woman upsets me altogether. It is a fact. When I sit on the creature's knees, it makes me feel as if—— You don't know all the horrors that she whispers into my ear while we are on the stage ! She's crazy ! I understand everything, but there are some things which disgust me. Michon, don't my stays crease at the back, on the right ? "

" My dear child," cried Trublet with enthusiasm, " you have just said something that is really admirable."

" What ? " inquired Nanteuil simply.

" You said : ' I understand everything, but there are some things which disgust me.' You understand everything ; the thoughts and actions of men

appear to you as particular instances of the universal mechanics, but in respect of them you cherish neither hatred nor anger. But there are things which disgust you ; you have a fastidious taste, and it is profoundly true that morals are a matter of taste. My child, I could wish that the Academy of Moral Science thought as sanely as you. Yes. You are quite right. As regards the instincts which you attribute to your fellow-actress, it is as futile to blame her for them as to blame lactic acid for being an acid possessing mixed properties."

"What are you talking about ?"

"I am saying that we can no longer assign praise or blame to any human thought or action, once the inevitable nature of such thoughts and actions has been proved for us."

"So you approve of the morals of that gawk of a Perrin, do you ? You, a member of the Legion of Honour ! A nice thing, to be sure !"

The doctor heaved himself up.

"My child," he said, "give me a moment's attention ; I am going to tell you an instructive story :

"In times gone by, human nature was other than it is to-day. There were then not men and women only, but also hermaphrodites ; in other words, beings in whom the two sexes were combined. These three kinds of human beings possessed four arms, four legs, and two faces. They

were robust and rotated rapidly on their own axes, just like wheels. Their strength inspired them with audacity to war with the gods, therein following the example of the Giants. Jupiter, unable to brook such insolence——"

"Michon, doesn't my petticoat hang too low on the left?" asked Nanteuil.

"Resolved," continued the doctor, "to render them less strong and less daring. He divided each into two, so that they had now but two arms, two legs, and one head apiece, and thenceforward the human race became what it is to-day. Consequently, each of us is only the half of a human being, divided from the other half, just as one divides a sole into two portions. These halves are ever seeking their other halves. The love which we experience for one another is nothing but an invisible force impelling us to reunite our two halves in order to re-establish ourselves in our pristine perfection. Those men who result from the divisions of hermaphrodites love women; those women who have a similar origin love men. But the women who proceed from the division of primitive women do not bestow much attention upon men, but are drawn toward their own sex. So do not be astonished when you see——"

"Did you invent that precious story, doctor?" inquired Nanteuil, pinning a rose in her bodice.

The doctor protested that he had not invented a word of it. On the contrary, he had, he said, left out part of the story.

"So much the better?" exclaimed Nanteuil. "For I must tell you that the person who did invent it is not particularly brilliant."

"He is dead," remarked Trublet.

Nanteuil once more expressed her disgust of her fellow-actress, but Madame Doulce, who was prudent and occasionally took *déjeuner* with Jeanne Perrin, changed the subject.

"Well, my darling, so you've got the part of Angélique. Only remember what I told you: your gestures should be somewhat restrained, and you yourself a little stiff. That is the secret of the *ingénue*. Beware of your charming natural suppleness. Young girls in a 'stock' piece ought to be just a trifle doll-like. It's good form. The costume requires it. You see, Félicie, what you must do above all, when you are playing in *La Mère confidente*, which is a delightful play——"

"Oh," interrupted Félicie, "so long as I have a good part, I don't care a fig for the play. Besides, I am not particularly in love with Marivaux—— What are you laughing at, doctor? Have I put my foot in it? Isn't *La Mère confidente* by Marivaux?"

"To be sure it is!"

"Well, then? You are always trying to muddle me. I was saying that Angélique gets on my nerves. I should prefer a part with more meat in it, something out of the ordinary. This evening, especially, the part gives me the creeps."

"All the more likely that you'll do well in it, my pet," said Madame Doulce. "We never enter more thoroughly into our parts than when we do so by main force, and in spite of ourselves. I could give you many examples. I myself, in *La Vivandière d'Austerlitz*, staggered the house by my gaiety of tone, when I had just been informed that my Doulce, so great an artist and so good a husband, had had an epileptic fit in the orchestra at the Odéon, just as he was picking up his cornet."

"Why do they insist on my being nothing but an *ingénue?*" inquired Nanteuil, who wanted to play the woman in love, the brilliant coquette, and every part a woman could play.

"That is quite natural," persisted Madame Doulce. "Comedy is an imitative art; and you imitate an art all the better for not feeling it yourself."

"Do not delude yourself, my child," said the doctor to Félicie. "Once an *ingénue*, always an *ingénue*. You are born an Angélique or a Dorine, a Célimène or a Madame Pernelle. On the stage, some women are always twenty, others are always

thirty, others again are always sixty. As for you, Mademoiselle Nanteuil, you will always be eighteen, and you will always be an *ingénue*."

"I am quite content with my work," replied Nanteuil, "but you cannot expect me to play all *ingénues* with the same pleasure. There is one part, for example, which I long to play, and that is Agnès in *L'École des femmes*."

At the mere mention of the name of Agnès, the doctor murmured delightedly from among his cushions :

"Mes yeux ont-ils du mal pour en donner au monde ?"

"Agnès, that's a part if you like!" exclaimed Nanteuil. "I have asked Pradel to give it me."

Pradel, the manager of the theatre, was an ex-comedian, a wideawake, genial fellow, who had got rid of his illusions and nourished no exaggerated hopes. He loved peace, books and women. Nanteuil had every reason to speak well of Pradel, and she referred to him without any feeling of ill will, and with frank directness.

"It was shameful, disgusting, rotten of him," she said. "He wouldn't let me play Agnès and gave the part to Falempin. I must say, though, that when I asked him I didn't go the right way about it. While she knows how to tackle him, if you like! But what do I care! If Pradel doesn't let

me play Agnès, he can go to the deuce, and his dirty Punch and Judy show too!"

Madame Doulce continued to lavish her unheeded precepts. She was an actress of merit, but she was old and worn out, and no longer obtained any engagements. She gave advice to beginners, wrote their letters for them, and thus, in the morning or evening, earned what was almost every day her only meal.

"Doctor," asked Félicie, while Madame Michon was fastening a black velvet ribbon round her neck: "You say that my fits of dizziness are due to my stomach. Are you sure of that?"

Before Trublet could answer, Madame Doulce exclaimed that fits of dizziness always proceeded from the stomach, and that two or three hours after meals she experienced a feeling of distension in hers, and she thereupon asked the doctor for a remedy.

Félicie, however, was thinking, for she was capable of thought.

"Doctor," she said suddenly, "I want to ask you a question, which you may possibly think a droll one; but I do really want to know whether, considering that you know just what there is in the human body, and that you have seen all the things we have inside us, it doesn't embarrass you, at certain moments, in your dealings with women?

It seems to me that the idea of all that must disgust you."

From the depths of his cushions Trublet, wafting a kiss to Félicie, replied :

"My dear child, there is no more exquisitely delicate, rich, and beautiful tissue than the skin of a pretty woman. That is what I was telling myself just now, while contemplating the back of your neck, and you will readily understand that, under such an impression——"

She made a grimace at him like that of a disdainful monkey.

"You think it witty, I suppose, to talk nonsense when anyone asks you a serious question?"

"Well, then, since you wish it, mademoiselle, you shall have an instructive answer. Some twenty years ago we had, in the post-mortem room at the Hôpital Saint-Joseph, a drunken old watchman, named Daddy Rousseau, who every day at eleven o'clock used to lunch at the end of the table on which the corpse was lying. He ate his lunch because he was hungry. Nothing prevents people who are hungry from eating as soon as they have got something to eat. Only Daddy Rousseau used to say : 'I don't know whether it is because of the atmosphere of the room, but I must have something fresh and appetizing.'"

"I understand," said Félicie. "Little flower-girls are what you want. But you mustn't, you know. And there you are seated like a Turk and you haven't written out my prescription yet." She cast an inquiring glance at him. "Where is the stomach exactly?"

The door had remained ajar. A young man, a very pretty fellow and extremely fashionable, pushed it open, and, having taken a couple of steps into the dressing-room, inquired politely whether he might come in.

"Oh, it's you!" said Nanteuil. And she stretched out her hand, which he kissed with pleasure, ceremony and fatuity.

"How are you, Doctor Socrates?" he inquired, without wasting any particular courtesies on Madame Doulce.

Trublet was often accosted in this manner, because of his snub-nose and his subtle speech. Pointing to Nanteuil, he said:

"Monsieur de Ligny, you see before you a young lady who is not quite sure whether she has a stomach. It is a serious question. We advise her to refer, for the answer, to the little girl who ate too much jam. Her mother said to her: 'You will injure your stomach.' The child replied: 'It's only ladies who have stomachs; little girls haven't any.'"

"Heavens, how silly you are, doctor!" cried Nanteuil.

"I would you spoke the truth, mademoiselle. Silliness is the capacity for happiness. It is the sovereign content. It is the prime asset in a civilized society."

"You are paradoxical, my dear doctor," remarked Monsieur de Ligny. "But I grant you that it is better to be silly as everybody is silly than to be clever as no one else is clever."

"It's true, what Robert says!" exclaimed Nanteuil, sincerely impressed. And she added thoughtfully: "At any rate, doctor, one thing is certain. It is that stupidity often prevents one from doing stupid things. I have noticed that many a time. Whether you take men or women, those are not the most stupid who act the most stupidly. For example, there are intelligent women who are stupid about men."

"You mean those who cannot do without them."

"There's no hiding anything from you, my little Socrates."

"Ah," sighed the big Doulce, "what a terrible slavery it is! Every woman who cannot control her senses is lost to art."

Nanteuil shrugged her pretty shoulders, which still retained something of the angularity of youth.

"Oh, my great-grandmother! Don't try to

kid the youngsters! What an idea! In your days, did actresses control their—how did you put it? Fiddlesticks! They didn't control them a scrap!"

Noticing that Nanteuil's temper was rising, the bulky Doulce retired with dignity and prudence. Once in the passage, she vouchsafed a further word of advice:

"Remember, my darling, to play Angélique as a 'bud.' The part requires it."

But Nanteuil, her nerves on edge, took no notice.

"Really," she said, sitting down before her dressing-table, "she makes me boil, that old Doulce, with her morality. Does she think people have forgotten her adventures? If so, she is mistaken. Madame Ravaud tells one of them six days out of seven. Everybody knows that she reduced her husband, the musician, to such a state of exhaustion that one night he tumbled into his cornet. As for her lovers, magnificent men, just ask Madame Michon. Why, in less than two years she made mere shadows of them, mere puffs of breath. That's the way she controlled them! And supposing anyone had told her that she was lost to art!"

Dr. Trublet extended his two hands, palms outward, towards Nanteuil, as though to stop her.

"Do not excite yourself, my child. Madame

Doulce is sincere. She used to love men, now she loves God. One loves what one can, as one can, and with what one has. She has become chaste and pious at the fitting age. She is diligent in the practices of her religion: she goes to Mass on Sundays and feast days, she—— "

"Well, she is right to go to Mass," asserted Nanteuil. "Michon, light a candle for me, to heat my rouge. I must do my lips again. Certainly, she is quite right to go to Mass, but religion does not forbid one to have a lover."

"You think not?" asked the doctor.

"I know my religion better than you, that's certain!"

A lugubrious bell sounded, and the mournful voice of the call-boy was heard in the corridors:

"The curtain-raiser is over!"

Nanteuil rose, and slipped over her wrist a velvet ribbon ornamented with a steel medallion. Madame Michon was on her knees arranging the three Watteau pleats of the pink dress, and, with her mouth full of pins, delivered herself from one corner of her lips of the following maxim:

"There is one good thing in being old, men cannot make you suffer any more."

Robert de Ligny took a cigarette from his case.

"May I?" And he moved toward the lighted candle on the dressing-table.

Nanteuil, who never took her eyes off him, saw beneath his moustache, red and light as flame, his lips, ruddy in the candlelight, drawing in and puffing out the smoke. She felt a slight warmth in her ears. Pretending to look among her trinkets, she grazed Ligny's neck with her lips, and whispered to him :

"Wait for me after the show, in a cab, at the corner of the Rue de Tournon."

At this moment the sound of voices and footsteps was heard in the corridor. The actors in the curtain-raiser were returning to their dressing-rooms.

"Doctor, pass me your newspaper."

"It is highly uninteresting, mademoiselle."

"Never mind, pass it over."

She took it and held it like a screen above her head.

"The light makes my eyes ache," she observed.

It was true that a too brilliant light would sometimes give her a headache. But she had just seen herself in the glass. With her blue-tinted eyelids, her eyelashes smeared with a black paste, her grease-painted cheeks, her lips tinted red in the shape of a tiny heart, it seemed to her she looked like a painted corpse with glass eyes, and she did not wish Ligny to see her thus.

While she was keeping her face in the shadow of the newspaper a tall, lean young man entered the

dressing-room with a swaggering gait. His melancholy eyes were deeply sunken above a nose like a crow's beak ; his mouth was set in a petrified grin. The Adam's apple of his long throat made a deep shadow on his stock. He was dressed as a stage bailiff.

"That you, Chevalier ? How are you, my friend ?" gaily inquired Dr. Trublet, who was fond of actors, preferred the bad ones, and had a special liking for Chevalier.

" Come in, everybody ! " cried Nanteuil. " This isn't a dressing-room ; it's a mill."

" My respects, none the less, Mme. Miller ! " replied Chevalier. " I warn you, there's a pack of idiots out in front. Would you believe it—they shut me up ! "

" That's no reason for walking in without knocking," replied Nanteuil snappishly.

The doctor pointed out that Monsieur de Ligny had left the door open ; whereupon Nanteuil, turning to Ligny, said in a tone of tender reproach :

" Did you really leave the door open ? But, when one comes into a room, one closes the door on other people : it is one of the first things one is taught."

She wrapped herself in a white blanket-cloak.

The call-boy summoned the players to the stage.

She grasped the hand which Ligny offered her, and, exploring his wrist with her fingers, dug her nail into the spot, close to the veins, where the skin is tender. Then she disappeared into the dark corridor.

CHAPTER II

HEVALIER, having resumed his ordinary clothes, sat in a corner box, beside Madame Doulce, gazing at Félicie, a small remote figure on the stage. And remembering the days when he had held her in his arms, in his attic in the Rue des Martyrs, he wept with grief and rage.

They had met last year at a fête given under the patronage of Lecureuil, the deputy; a benefit performance given in aid of poor actors of the ninth *arrondissement*. He had prowled around her, dumb, famishing, and with blazing eyes. For a whole fortnight he had pursued her incessantly. Cold and unmoved, she had appeared to ignore him. Then, suddenly, she surrendered; so suddenly that when he left her that day, still radiant and amazed, he had said a stupid thing. He had told her: "And I took you for a little bit of china!" For three whole months he had tasted joys acute as pain. Then Félicie had grown elusive, remote, and estranged. She loved him no longer. He sought the reason, but could not discover it. It tortured him

to know that he was no longer loved ; jealousy tortured him still more. It was true that in the first beautiful hours of his love he had known that Félicie had a lover, one Girmandel, a court bailiff, who lived in the Rue de Provence, and he had felt it deeply. But as he never saw him he had formed so confused and ill-defined an idea of him that his jealousy lost itself in uncertainty. Félicie assured him that she had never been more than passive in her intercourse with Girmandel, that she had not even pretended to care for him. He believed her, and this belief gave him the keenest satisfaction. She also told him that for a long time past, for months, Girmandel had been nothing more than a friend, and he believed her. In short, he was deceiving the bailiff, and it was agreeable to him to feel that he enjoyed this advantage. He had learned also that Félicie, who was just finishing her second year at the Conservatoire, had not denied herself to her professor. But the grief which he had felt because of this was softened by a time-honoured and venerable custom. Now Robert de Ligny was causing him intolerable suffering. For some time past he had found him incessantly dangling about her. He could not doubt that she loved Robert ; and although he sometimes told himself that she had not yet given herself to this man, it was not that he believed it, but merely that

he was fain sometimes to mitigate the bitterness of his sufferings.

Mechanical applause broke out at the back of the theatre, and a few members of the orchestra, murmuring inaudibly, clapped their hands slowly and noiselessly. Nanteuil had just given her last reply to Jeanne Perrin.

"*Brava! Brava!* She is delightful, dear little woman!" sighed Madame Doulce.

In his jealous anger, Chevalier was disloyal. Lifting a finger to his forehead, he remarked:

"She plays with *that.*" Then, placing his hand upon his heart, he added: "It is with this that one should act."

"Thanks, dear friend, thanks!" murmured Madame Doulce, who read into these maxims an obvious eulogy of herself.

She was, indeed, in the habit of asserting that all good acting comes from the heart; she maintained that, to give full expression to a passion, it was necessary to experience it, and to feel in one's own person the expressions that one wished to represent. She was fond of referring to herself as an example of this. When appearing as a tragedy queen, after draining a goblet of poison on the stage, her bowels had been on fire all night. Nevertheless she was given to saying: "The dramatic art is an imitative art, and one imitates an emotion all

the better for not having experienced it." And to illustrate this maxim she drew yet further examples from her triumphant career.

She gave a deep sigh.

"The child is admirably gifted. But she is to be pitied; she has been born into a bad period. There is no longer a public nowadays; no critics, no plays, no theatres, no artists. It is a decadence of art."

Chevalier shook his head.

"No need to pity her," he said. "She will have all that she can wish; she will succeed; she will be wealthy. She is a selfish little jade, and a woman who is selfish can get anything she likes. But for people with hearts there's nothing left but to hang a stone round one's neck and throw oneself into the river. But, I too, I shall go far. I, too, shall climb high. I, too, will be a selfish hound."

He got up and went out without waiting for the end of the play. He did not return to Félicie's dressing-room for fear of meeting Ligny there, the sight of whom was insupportable, and because by avoiding it he could pretend to himself that Ligny had not returned thither.

Conscious of physical distress on going away from her, he took five or six turns under the dark, deserted arcades of the Odéon, went down the steps into the night, and turned up the Rue de

Médicis. Coachmen were dozing on their boxes, while waiting for the end of the performance, and high over the tops of the plane-trees the moon was racing through the clouds. Treasuring in his heart an absurd yet soothing remnant of hope, he went, this night, as on other nights, to wait for Félicie at her mother's flat.

CHAPTER III

ADAME NANTEUIL lived with her daughter in a little flat on the fifth story of a house in the Boulevard Saint-Michel, whose windows opened upon the garden of the Luxembourg. She gave Chevalier a friendly welcome, for she thought kindly of him because he loved Félicie, and because the latter did not love him in return, and ignored on principle the fact that he had been her daughter's lover.

She made him sit beside her in the dining-room, where a coke fire was burning in the stove. In the lamplight army revolvers and sabres with golden tassels on the sword-knots gleamed upon the wall. They were hung about a woman's cuirass, which was provided with round breast-shields of tin-plate; a piece or armour which Félicie had worn last winter, while still a pupil at the Conservatoire, when taking the part of Joan of Arc at the house of a spiritualistic duchess. An officer's widow and the mother of an actress, Madame Nanteuil, whose real name was Nantean, treasured these trophies.

"Félicie is not back yet, Monsieur Chevalier. I don't expect her before midnight. She is on the stage till the end of the play."

"I know; I was in the first piece. I left the theatre after the first act of *La Mère confidente.*

"Oh, Monsieur Chevalier, why didn't you stay till the end? My daughter would have been so pleased if you had waited. When one is acting, one likes to have friends in the house."

Chevalier replied ambiguously:

"Oh, as to friends, there are plenty of those about."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur Chevalier; good friends are scarce. Madame Doulce was there, of course? Was she pleased with Félicie?" And she added, with great humility: "I should indeed be happy if she could really make a hit. It is so difficult to come to the fore in her profession, for a girl who is alone, without support, without influence! And it is so necessary for her to succeed, poor child!"

Chevalier did not feel disposed to lavish any pity upon Félicie. With a shrug of the shoulders he replied bluntly:

"No need to worry about that. She'll get on. She is an actress heart and soul. She has it in her bones, down to her very legs."

Madame Nanteuil indulged in a quiet smile.

"Poor child! They are not very plump, her legs. Félicie's health is not bad, but she must not overdo it. She often has fits of giddiness, and sick headaches."

The servant came in to place on the table a dish of fried sausage, a bottle of wine, and a few plates.

Meanwhile, Chevalier was searching in his mind for some appropriate fashion of asking a question which had been on the tip of his tongue ever since he had set foot on the stairs. He wanted to know whether Félicie was still meeting Girmandel, whose name he never heard mentioned nowadays. We are given to conceiving desires which suit themselves to our condition. Now, in the misery of his existence, in the distress of his heart, he was full of an eager desire that Félicie, who loved him no longer, should love Girmandel, whom she loved but little, and he hoped with all his heart that Girmandel would keep her for him, would possess her wholly, and leave nothing of her for Robert de Ligny. The idea that the girl might be with Girmandel appeased his jealousy, and he dreaded to learn that she had broken with him.

Of course he would never have allowed himself to question a mother as to her daughter's lovers. But it was permissible to speak of Girmandel to Madame Nanteuil, who saw nothing that was other

than respectable in the relations of her household with the Government official, who was well-to-do, married, and the father of two charming daughters. To bring Girmandel's name into the conversation he had only to resort to a stratagem. Chevalier hit upon one which he thought was ingenious.

"By the way," he remarked, "I saw Girmandel just now in a carriage."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"He was driving down the Boulevard Saint-Michel in a cab. I certainly thought I recognized him. I should be greatly surprised if it wasn't he."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"His fair beard, his high colour—he's an easy man to recognize, Girmandel."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"You were very friendly with him at one time, you and Félicie. Do you still see him?"

"Monsieur Girmandel? Oh yes, we still see him," replied Madame Nanteuil softly.

These words made Chevalier feel almost happy. But she had deceived him; she had not spoken the truth. She had lied out of self-respect, and in order not to reveal a domestic secret which she regarded as derogatory to the honour of her family. The truth was that, being carried away by her passion for Ligny, Félicie had given Girmandel the go-by, and he, being a man of the world, had promptly cut

off supplies. Madame Nanteuil, despite her years, had resumed an old lover, out of her love for her child, that she might not want for anything. She had renewed her former liaison with Tony Meyer, the picture-dealer in the Rue de Clichy. Tony Meyer was a poor substitute for Girmandel; he was none too free with his money. Madame Nanteuil, who was wise and knew the value of things, did not complain on that account, and she was rewarded for her devotion, for, in the six weeks during which she had been loved anew, she had grown young again.

Chevalier, following up his idea, inquired:

"You would hardly say that Girmandel was still a young man, would you?"

"He is not old," said Madame Nanteuil. "A man is not old at forty."

"A bit used up, isn't he?"

"Oh, dear no," replied Madame Nanteuil, quite calmly.

Chevalier became thoughtful and was silent. Madame Nanteuil began to nod. Then, being aroused from her somnolence by the servant, who brought in the salt-cellar and the water-bottle, she inquired:

"And you, Monsieur Chevalier, is all well with you?"

No, all was not well with him. The critics were

out to "down" him. And the proof that they had combined against him was that they all said the same thing; they said his face lacked expression.

"My face lacking in expression!" he cried indignantly. "They should have called it a predestined face. Madame Nanteuil, I aim high, and it is that which does me harm. For example, in *La Nuit du 23 octobre*, which is being rehearsed now, I am Florentin: I have only six lines; it's a washout. But I have increased the importance of the character enormously. Durville is furious. He deliberately crabs all my effects."

Madame Nanteuil, placid and kindly, found words to comfort him. Obstacles there were, no doubt, but in the end one overcame them. Her own daughter had fallen foul of the ill-will of certain critics.

"Half-past twelve!" said Chevalier gloomily. "Félicie is late."

Madame Nanteuil supposed that she had been detained by Madame Doulce.

"Madame Doulce as a rule undertakes to see her home, and you know she never hurries herself."

Chevalier rose, as if to take his leave, to show that he remembered his manners. Madame Nanteuil begged him to stay.

"Don't go; Félicie won't be long now. She

will be pleased to find you here. You will have supper with her.

Madame Nanteuil dozed off again in her chair. Chevalier sat gazing in silence at the clock hanging on the wall, and as the hand travelled across the dial he felt a burning wound in his heart, which grew bigger and bigger, and each little stroke of the pendulum touched him to the quick, lending a keener eye to his jealousy, by recording the moments which Félicie was passing with Ligny. For he was now convinced that they were together. The stillness of the night, interrupted only by the muffled sound of the cabs bowling along the boulevard, gave reality to the thoughts and images which tortured him. He could see them.

Awakened with a start by the sound of singing on the pavement below, Madame Nanteuil returned to the thought with which she had fallen asleep.

"That's what I am always telling Félicie : one mustn't be discouraged. One should not lose heart. We all have our ups and downs in life."

Chevalier nodded acquiescence.

"But those who suffer," he said, "only get what they deserve. It needs but a moment to free oneself from all one's troubles. Isn't it so?"

She admitted the fact ; certainly there were such things as sudden opportunities, especially on the stage.

"Heaven knows," he continued in a deep, brooding voice, "it's not the stage I am worrying about. I know I shall make a name for myself one day, and a big one. But what's the good of being a great artist if one isn't happy? There are stupid worries which are terrible! Pains that throb in your temples with strokes as even and as regular as the ticking of that clock, till they drive you mad!"

He ceased speaking; the gloomy gaze of his deep-set eyes fell upon the trophy hanging on the wall. Then he continued:

"These stupid worries, these ridiculous sufferings, if one endures them too long, it simply means that one is a coward."

And he felt the butt of the revolver which he always carried in his pocket.

Madame Nanteuil listened to him serenely, with that gentle determination not to know anything, which had been her one talent in life.

"Another dreadful thing," she observed, "is to decide what to have to eat. Félicie is sick of everything. There's no knowing what to get for her."

After that, the flagging conversation languished, drawn out into detached phrases, which had no particular meaning. Madame Nanteuil, the servant, the coke fire, the lamp, the plate of sausage, awaited Félicie in depressing silence. The clock struck one.

Chevalier's suffering had by this time attained the serenity of a flood tide. He was now certain. The cabs were not so frequent and their wheels echoed more loudly along the street. The rumbling of one of these cabs suddenly ceased outside the house. A few seconds later he heard the slight grating of a key in the lock, the slamming of the door, and light footsteps in the outer room.

The clock marked twenty-three minutes past one. He was suddenly full of agitation, yet hopeful. She had come! Who could tell what she would say? She might offer the most natural explanation of her late arrival.

Félicie entered the room, her hair in disorder, her eyes shining, her cheeks white, her bruised lips a vivid red; she was tired, indifferent, mute, happy and lovely, seeming to guard beneath her cloak, which she held wrapped about her with both hands, some remnant of warmth and voluptuous pleasure.

"I was beginning to be worried," said her mother. "Aren't you going to unfasten your cloak?"

"I'm hungry," she replied. She dropped into a chair before the little round table. Throwing her cloak over the back of the chair, she revealed her slender figure in its little black schoolgirl's dress, and, resting her left elbow on the oil-cloth table-cover, she proceeded to stick her fork into the sliced sausage.

"Did everything go off well to-night?" asked Madame Nanteuil.

"Quite well."

"You see Chevalier has come to keep you company. It is kind of him, isn't it?"

"Oh, Chevalier! Well, let him come to the table."

And, without replying further to her mother's questions, she began to eat, greedy and charming, like Ceres in the old woman's house. Then she pushed aside her plate, and leaning back in her chair, with half-closed eyes, and parted lips, she smiled a smile that was akin to a kiss.

Madame Nanteuil, having drunk her glass of mulled wine, rose to her feet.

"You will excuse me, Monsieur Chevalier, I have my accounts to bring up to date."

This was the formula which she usually employed to announce that she was going to bed.

Left alone with Félicie, Chevalier said to her angrily:

"I know I'm a fool and a groveller; but I'm going mad for love of you. Do you hear, Félicie?"

"I should think I do hear. You needn't shout like that!"

"It's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"No, it's not ridiculous, it's——"

She did not complete the sentence.

He drew nearer to her, dragging his chair with him.

"You came in at twenty-five minutes past one. It was Ligny who saw you home, I know it. He brought you back in a cab, I heard it stop outside the house."

As she did not reply, he continued :

"Deny it, if you can !"

She remained silent, and he repeated, in an urgent, almost appealing tone :

"Tell me he didn't !"

Had she been so inclined, she might, with a phrase, with a single word, with a tiny movement of head or shoulders, have rendered him perfectly submissive, and almost happy. But she maintained a malicious silence. With compressed lips and a far-off look in her eyes, she seemed as though lost in a dream.

He sighed hoarsely.

"Fool that I was, I didn't think of that ! I told myself you would come home, as on other nights, with Madame Doulce, or else alone. If I had only known that you were going to let that fellow see you home !"

"Well, what would you have done, had you known it ?"

"I should have followed you, by God !"

She stared at him with hard, unnaturally bright eyes.

"That I forbid you to do! Understand me! If I learn that you have followed me, even once, I'll never see you again. To begin with, you haven't the right to follow me. I suppose I am free to do as I like."

Choking with astonishment and anger, he stammered:

"Haven't the right to? Haven't the right to? You tell me I haven't the right?"

"No, you haven't the right! Moreover, I won't have it." Her face assumed an expression of disgust. "It's a mean trick to spy on a woman. If you once try to find out where I'm going, I'll send you about your business, and quickly at that."

"Then," he murmured, thunderstruck, "we are nothing to each other, I am nothing to you. We have never belonged to each other. But see, Félicie, remember——"

But she was losing patience:

"Well, what do you want me to remember?"

"Félicie, remember that you gave yourself to me!"

"My dear boy, you really can't expect me to think of that all day. It wouldn't be proper."

He looked at her for a while, more in curiosity

than in anger, and said to her, half bitterly, half gently :

"They may well call you a selfish little jade! Be one, Félicie, be one, as much as you like! What does it matter, since I love you? You are mine ; I am going to take you back ; I am going to take you back, and keep you. Think! I can't go on suffering for ever, like a poor dumb beast. Listen. I'll start with a clean slate. Let us begin to love one another over again. And this time it will be all right. And you'll be mine for good, mine only. I am an honest man ; you know that. You can depend on me. I'll marry you as soon as I've got a position."

She gazed at him with disdainful surprise. He believed that she had doubts as to his dramatic future, and, in order to banish them, he said, erect on his long legs :

"Don't you believe in my star, Félicie? You are wrong. I can feel that I am capable of creating great parts. Let them only give me a part, and they'll see. And I have in me not only comedy, but drama, tragedy—yes, tragedy. I can deliver verse properly. And that is a talent which is becoming rare in these days. So don't imagine, Félicie, that I am insulting you when I offer you marriage. Far from it! We will marry later on, as soon as it is possible and suitable. Of

course, there is no need for hurry. Meanwhile, we will resume our pleasant habits of the Rue des Martyrs. You remember, Félicie; we were so happy there! The bed wasn't wide, but we used to say: 'That doesn't matter.' I have now two fine rooms in the Rue de la Montagne-Saint-Geneviève, behind Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Your portrait hangs on every wall. You will find there the little bed of the Rue des Martyrs. Listen to me, I beg of you: I have suffered too much; I will not suffer any longer. I demand that you shall be mine, mine only."

While he was speaking, Félicie had taken from the mantelpiece the pack of cards with which her mother played every night, and was spreading them out on the table.

"Mine only. You hear me, Félicie."

"Don't disturb me, I am busy with a game of patience."

"Listen to me, Félicie. I won't have you receiving that fool in your dressing-room."

Looking at her cards she murmured:

"All the blacks are at the bottom of the pack."

"I say that fool. He is a diplomatist, and nowadays the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the refuge of incompetents." Raising his voice, he continued: "Félicie, for your own sake, as well as for mine, listen to me!"

"Well, don't shout, then. Mama is asleep."

He continued in muffled tones:

"Just get it into your head that I don't intend that Ligny shall be your lover."

She raised her spiteful little face, and replied:

"And if he is my lover?"

He moved a step closer to her, raising his chair, gazing at her with the eye of a madman, and laughing a cracked laugh.

"If he is your lover, he won't be so for long."

And he dropped the chair.

Now she was alarmed. She forced herself to smile.

"You know very well I'm joking!"

She succeeded without much difficulty in making him believe that she had spoken thus merely to punish him, because he was getting unbearable. He became calmer. She then informed him that she was tired out, that she was dropping with sleep. At last he decided to go home. On the landing he turned, and said:

"Félicie, I advise you, if you wish to avoid a tragedy, not to see Ligny again."

She cried through the half-open door:

"Knock on the window of the porter's lodge, so that he can let you out!"

CHAPTER IV

IN the dark auditorium large linen sheets protected the balcony and the boxes. The orchestra was covered with a huge dust-cloth, which, being turned back at the edges, left room for a few human figures, indistinctly seen in the gloom: actors, scene-shifters, costumiers, friends of the manager, mothers and lovers and actresses. Here and there shone a pair of eyes from the black recesses of the boxes.

They were rehearsing, for the fifty-sixth time, *La Nuit du 23 octobre 1812*, a celebrated drama, dating twenty years back, which had not as yet been performed in this theatre. The actors knew their parts, and the following day had been chosen for that last private rehearsal which on stages less austere than that of the Odéon is known as "the dressmakers' rehearsal."

Nanteuil had no part in the play. But she had had business at the theatre that day, and, as she had been informed that Marie-Claire was execrable

in the part of General Malet's wife, she had come to have a peep at her, concealed in the depths of a box.

The great scene of the second act was about to begin. The stage setting represented an attic in the private asylum where the conspirator was confined in 1812. Durville, who filled the part of General Malet, had just made his entrance. He was rehearsing in costume : a long blue frock-coat, with a collar reaching above his ears, and riding-breeches of chamois leather. He had even gone so far as to make up his face for the part, the clean-shaven soldierly face of the general of the Empire, ornamented with the " hare's-foot " whiskers which were handed down by the victors of Austerlitz to their sons, the bourgeois of July. Standing erect, his right elbow resting in his left hand, his brow supported by his right hand, his deep voice and his tight-fitting breeches expressed his pride.

" Alone, and without funds, from the depths of a prison, to attack this colossus, who commands a million soldiers, and who causes all the peoples and kings of Europe to tremble. Well, this colossus shall fall crashing to the ground."

From the back of the stage old Maury, who was playing the conspirator Jacquemont, delivered his reply :

" He may crush us in his downfall."

Suddenly cries at once plaintive and angry arose from the orchestra.

The author was exploding. He was a man of seventy, brimming over with youth.

"What do I see there at the back of the stage? It's not an actor, it's a fire-place. We shall have to send for the bricklayers, the marble-workers, to move it. Maury, do get a move on, confound you!"

Maury shifted his position.

"He may crush us in his downfall. I realize that it will not be your fault, General. Your proclamation is excellent. You promise them a constitution, liberty, equality. It is Machiavellian."

Durville replied:

"And in the best sense. An incorrigible breed, they are making ready to violate the oaths that they have not yet taken, and, because they lie, they believe themselves Machiavellis. What will you do with absolute power, you simpletons?"

The strident voice of the author ground out:

"You are right off the track, Dauville."

"I?" asked the astonished Durville.

"Yes, you, Dauville, you do not understand a word of what you are saying."

In order to humiliate them, "to take them down a peg," this man who, in the whole course of his life, had never forgotten the name of a dairy-

woman or a hall-porter, disdained to remember the names of the most illustrious actors.

"Dauville, my friend, just do that over again for me."

He could play every part well. Jovial, funereal, violent, tender, impetuous, affectionate, he assumed at will a deep or a piping voice; he sighed, he roared, he laughed, he wept. He could transform himself, like the man in the fairy-tale, into a flame, a river, a woman, a tiger.

In the wings the actors exchanged only short and meaningless phrases. Their freedom of speech, their easy morals, the familiarity of their manners did not prevent their retaining so much of hypocrisy as is needful, in any assemblage of men, if people are to look upon one another without feelings of horror and disgust. There even prevailed, in this work-shop in full activity, a seemly appearance of harmony and union, a oneness of feeling created by the thought, lofty or commonplace, of the author, a spirit of order which compelled all rivalries and all illwill to transform themselves into goodwill and harmonious co-operation.

Nanteuil, sitting in her box, felt uneasy at the thought that Chevalier was close at hand. For the last two days, since the night on which he had uttered his obscure threats, she had not seen him again, and the fear with which he had inspired her

still possessed her. "Félicie, if you wish to prevent a tragedy, I advise you not to see Ligny again." What did those words portend? She pondered deeply over Chevalier. This young fellow, who, only two days earlier, had seemed to her commonplace and insignificant, of whom she had seen a good deal too much, whom she knew by heart—how mysterious and full of secrets he now appeared to her! How suddenly it had dawned upon her that she did not know him! Of what was he capable? She tried to guess. What was he going to do? Probably nothing. All men who are thrown over by a woman utter threats and do nothing. But was Chevalier a man quite like all the rest? People did say that he was crazy. That was mere talk. But she herself did not feel sure that there might not be a spark of insanity in him. She was studying him now with genuine interest. Highly intelligent herself, she had never discovered any great signs of intelligence in him; but he had on several occasions astonished her by the obstinacy of his will. She could remember his performing acts of the fiercest energy. Jealous by nature, there were yet certain matters which he understood. He knew what a woman is compelled to do in order to win a place on the stage, or to dress herself properly; but he could not endure to be deceived for the sake of love. Was

he the sort of man to commit a crime, to do something dreadful? That was what she could not decide. She recalled his mania for handling firearms. When she used to visit him in the Rue des Martyrs, she always found him in his room, taking an old shot-gun to pieces and cleaning it. And yet he never went shooting. He boasted of being a dead shot, and carried a revolver on his person. But what did that prove? Never before had she thought so much about him.

Nanteuil was tormenting herself in this fashion in her box, when Jenny Fagette came to join her there; Jenny Fagette, slender and fragile, the incarnation of Alfred de Musset's Muse, who at night wore out her eyes of periwinkle-blue by scribbling society notes and fashion articles. A mediocre actress, but a clever and wonderfully energetic woman, she was Nanteuil's most intimate friend. They recognized in each other remarkable qualities, qualities which differed from those which each discovered in herself, and they acted in concert as the two great Powers of the Odéon. Nevertheless, Fagette was doing her best to take Ligny away from her friend; not from inclination, for she was insensible as a stick and held men in contempt, but with the idea that a liaison with a diplomatist would procure her certain advantages, and above all, in order not to miss the opportunity of doing some-

thing scandalous. Nanteuil was aware of this. She knew that all her sister-actresses, Ellen Midi, Duvernet, Herschell, Falempin, Stella, Marie-Claire, were trying to take Ligny from her. She had seen Louise Dalle, who dressed like a music-mistress, and always had the air of being about to storm an omnibus, and retained, even in her provocations and accidental contacts, the appearance of incurable respectability, pursue Ligny with her lanky legs, and beset him with the glances of a poverty-stricken Pasiphae. She had also surprised the oldest actress of the theatre, their excellent mother Ravaud, in a corridor, baring, at Ligny's approach, all that was left to her, her magnificent arms, which had been famous for forty years.

Fagette, with disgust, and the tip of a gloved finger, called Nanteuil's attention to the scene through which Durville, old Maury and Marie-Claire were struggling.

"Just look at those people. They look as if they were playing at the bottom of thirty fathoms of water."

"It's because the top lights are not lit."

"Not a bit of it. This theatre always looks as if it were at the bottom of the sea. And to think that I, too, in a moment, have to enter that aquarium. Nanteuil, you must not stop longer than one season in this theatre. One is drowned in it. But look at them, look at them!"

Durville was becoming almost ventriloqual in order to seem more solemn and more virile :

"Peace, the abolition of the combined martial and civil law, and of conscription, higher pay for the troops ; in the absence of funds, a few drafts on the bank, a few commissions suitably distributed, these are infallible means."

Madame Doulce entered the box. Unfastening her cloak with its pathetic lining of old rabbit-skin, she produced a small dog's-eared book.

"They are Madame de Sévigné's letters," she said. "You know that next Sunday I am going to give a reading of the best of Madame de Sévigné's letters."

"Where ? " asked Fagette.

"Salle Renard."

It must have been some remote and little known hall, for Nanteuil and Fagette had not heard of it.

"I am giving this reading for the benefit of the three poor orphans left by Lacour, the actor, who died so sadly of consumption this winter. I am counting on you, my darlings, to dispose of some tickets for me."

"All the same, she really is ridiculous, Marie-Claire ! " said Nanteuil.

Some one scratched at the door of the box. It was Constantin Marc, the youthful author of a play,

La Grille, which the Odéon was going to rehearse immediately; and Constantin Marc, although a countryman living in the forest, could henceforth breathe only in the theatre. Nanteuil was to take the principal part in the play. He gazed upon her with emotion, as the precious amphora destined to be the receptacle of his thought.

Meanwhile Durville continued hoarsely:

"If our France can be saved only at the price of our life and honour, I shall say, with the man of '93: 'Perish our memory!'"

Fagette pointed her finger at a bloated youth, who was sitting in the orchestra, resting his chin on his walking-stick.

"Isn't that Baron Deutz?"

"Need you ask!" replied Nanteuil. "Ellen Midi is in the cast. She plays in the fourth act. Baron Deutz has come to display himself."

"Just wait a minute, my children; I have a word to say to that ill-mannered cub. He met me yesterday in the Place de la Concorde, and he didn't bow to me."

"What, Baron Deutz? He couldn't have seen you!"

"He saw me perfectly well. But he was with his people. I am going to have him on toast. Just you watch, my dears."

She called him very softly:

"Deutz! Deutz!"

The Baron came towards her, smiling and well-pleased with himself, and leaned his elbows on the edge of the box.

"Tell me, Monsieur Deutz, when you met me yesterday, were you in very bad company that you did not raise your hat to me?"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"I? I was with my sister."

"Oh!"

On the stage, Marie-Claire, hanging upon Durville's neck, was exclaiming:

"Go! Victorious or defeated, in good or evil fortune, your glory will be equally great. Come what may, I shall know how to show myself the wife of a hero."

"That will do, Madame Marie-Claire!" said Pradel.

Just at that moment Chevalier made his entry, and immediately the author, tearing his hair, let oose a flood of imprecations:

"Do you call that an entry? It's a tumble, a catastrophe, a cataclysm! Ye gods! A meteor, an aerolith, a bit of the moon falling on to the stage would be less horribly disastrous? I will take off my play! Chevalier, come in again, my good fellow!"

The artist who had designed the costumes,

Michel, a fair young man with a mystic's beard, was seated in the first row, on the arm of a stall. He leaned over and whispered into the ear of Roger, the scene-painter :

"And to think it's the fifty-sixth time that he's dropped on Chevalier with the same fury !"

"Well, you know, Chevalier is rottenly bad," replied Roger, without hesitation.

"It isn't that he is bad," returned Michel indulgently. "But he always seems to be laughing, and nothing could be worse for a comedy actor. I knew him when he was quite a kid, at Montmartre. At school his masters used to ask him : 'Why are you laughing ?' He was not laughing ; he had no desire to laugh ; he used to get his ears boxed from morning to night. His parents wanted to put him in a chemical factory. But he had dreams of the stage, and spent his days on the Butte Montmartre, in the studio of the painter Montalent. Montalent at that time was working day and night on his *Death of Saint Louis*, a huge picture which was commissioned for the cathedral of Carthage. One day, Montalent said to him—— "

"A little less noise !" shouted Pradel.

"Said to him : 'Chevalier, since you have nothing to do, just sit for Philippe the Bold.' 'With pleasure,' said Chevalier. Montalent told him to assume the attitude of a man bowed down with

grief. More, he stuck two tears as big as spectacle lenses on his cheeks. He finished his picture, forwarded it to Carthage, and had half a dozen bottles of champagne sent up. Three months later he received from Father Cornemuse, the head of the French Missions in Tunis, a letter informing him that his painting of the *Death of Saint Louis*, having been submitted to the Cardinal-Archbishop, had been refused by His Eminence, because of the unseemly expression on the face of Philippe the Bold, who was laughing as he watched the saintly King, his father, dying on a bed of straw. Montalent could not make head or tail of it; he was furious, and wanted to take proceedings against the Cardinal-Archbishop. His painting was returned to him; he unpacked it, gazed at it in gloomy silence, and suddenly shouted: 'It's true—Philippe the Bold appears to be splitting his sides with laughter. What a fool I have been! I gave him the head of Chevalier, who always seems to be laughing, the brute!'"

"Will you be quiet there!" yelled Pradel.

And the author exclaimed:

"Pradel, my dear boy, just pitch all those people into the street."

Indefatigable, he was arranging the scene:

"A little farther, Trouville, there. Chevalier, you walk up to the table, you pick up the docu-

ments one by one, and you say: 'Senatus-Consultum. Order of the day. Despatches to the departments. Proclamation.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master. 'Senatus-Consultum. Order of the day. Despatches to the departments. Proclamation.'"

"Now, Marie-Claire, my child, a little more life, confound it! Cross over! That's it! Very good. Back again! Good! Very good! Buck up! Ah, the wretched woman! She's spoiling it all!"

He called the stage manager.

"Romilly, give us a little more light, one can't see an inch. Dauville, my dear friend, what are you doing there in front of the prompter's box! You seem glued to it! Just get into your head, once for all, that you are not the statue of General Malet, that you are General Malet in person, that my play is not a catalogue of wax-work figures, but a living moving tragedy, one which brings the tears into your eyes, and——"

Words failed him, and he sobbed for a long while into his handkerchief. Then he roared:

"Holy thunder! Pradel! Romilly! Where is Romilly? Ah, there he is, the villain! Romilly, I told you to put the stove nearer the dormer-window. You have not done so. What are you thinking of, my friend?"

The rehearsal was suddenly brought to a stand-still by a serious difficulty. Chevalier, the bearer of documents on which hung the fate of the Empire, was to escape from his prison by the dormer-window. The stage "business" had not yet been settled; it had been impossible to do so before the setting of the stage was completed. It was now discovered that the measurements had been wrongly taken, and the dormer-window was not accessible.

The author leapt on to the stage.

"Romilly, my friend, the stove is not in the place fixed on. How can you expect Chevalier to get out through the dormer-window? Push the stove to the right at once."

"I'm willing enough," said Romilly, "but we shall be blocking up the door."

"What's that? We shall be blocking up the door?"

"Precisely."

The manager of the theatre, the stage-manager, the scene-shifters stood examining the stage-setting with gloomy attention, while the author held his peace.

"Don't worry, Master, said Chevalier. "There's no need to change anything. I shall be able to jump out all right."

Climbing on to the stove, he did indeed succeed in grasping the sill of the window, and in hoisting

himself up until his elbows rested on it, a feat that had seemed impossible.

A murmur of admiration rose from the stage, the wings, and the house. Chevalier had produced an astonishing impression by his strength and agility.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the author. "Chevalier, my friend, that is perfect. The fellow is as nimble as a monkey. I'll be hanged if any of you could do as much. If all the parts were in such good hands as that of Florentin, the play would be lauded to the skies."

Nanteuil, in her box, almost admired him. For one brief second he had seemed to her more than man, both man and gorilla, and the fear with which he had inspired her was immeasurably increased. She did not love him; she had never loved him; she did not desire him; it was a long time since she had really wanted him; and, for some days past, she had been unable to imagine herself taking pleasure in any other than Ligny; but had she at that moment found herself alone with Chevalier she would have felt powerless, and she would have sought to appease him by her submission as one appeases a supernatural power.

On the stage, while an Empire *salon* was being lowered from the flies, through all the noise of the running gear and the grounding of the supports, the author held the whole of the company, as well

as all the supers, in the hollow of his hand, and at the same time gave them all advice, or illustrated what he wanted of them.

"You, the big woman, the cake-seller, Madame Ravaud, haven't you ever heard the women calling in the Champs-Élysées: 'Eat your fill, ladies! This way for a treat!' It is *sung*. Just learn the tune by to-morrow. And you, drummer-boy, just give me your drum; I'm going to teach you how to beat the roll, confound it! Fagette, my child, what the mischief are you doing at a ball given by the Minister of Police, if you haven't any stockings with golden clocks? Take off those knitted woollen stockings immediately. This is the very last play that I shall produce in this theatre. Where is the colonel of the 10th cohort? So it's you? Well then, my friend, your soldiers march past like so many pigs. Madame Marie-Claire, come forward a little, so that I may teach you how to curtsy."

He had a hundred eyes, a hundred mouths, and arms and legs everywhere.

In the house, Romilly was shaking hands with Monsieur Gombaut, of the Academy of Moral Sciences, who had dropped in as a neighbour.

"You may say what you will, Monsieur Gombaut, it is perhaps not accurate as far as facts are concerned, but it's drama."

"Malet's conspiracy," replied Monsieur Gom-

baut, "remains, and will doubtless remain for a long time to come, an historical enigma. The author of this drama has taken advantage of those points which are obscure in order to introduce dramatic elements. But what, to my thinking, is beyond a doubt, is that General Malet, although associated with Royalists, was himself a Republican, and was working for the re-establishment of popular Government. In the course of his examination during the trial, he pronounced a sublime and profound utterance. When the presiding judge of the court-martial asked him : 'Who were your accomplices ?' Malet replied : 'All France, and you yourself, had I succeeded.'"

Leaning on the edge of Nanteuil's box, an aged sculptor, as venerable and as handsome as an ancient satyr, was gazing with glistening eye and smiling lips at the stage, which at that moment was in a state of commotion and confusion.

"Are you pleased with the play, Master ?" Nanteuil asked him.

And the Master, who had no eyes for anything but bones, tendons and muscles, replied :

"Yes, indeed, mademoiselle ; yes, indeed ! I see over there a little creature, little Midi, whose shoulder attachment is a jewel."

He outlined it with his thumb. Tears welled up into his eyes.

Chevalier asked if he might enter the box. He was happy, less on account of his prodigious success than at seeing Félicie. He dreamed, in his infatuation, that she had come for his sake, that she loved him, that she was returning to him.

She feared him, and, as she was timid, she flattered him.

"I congratulate you, Chevalier. You were simply astounding. Your exit is a marvel. You can take my word for it. I am not the only one to say so. Fagette thought you were wonderful."

"Really?" asked Chevalier.

It was one of the happiest moments of his life.

A shrieking voice issued from the deserted heights of the third galleries, sounding through the house like the whistle of a locomotive.

"One can't hear a word you say, my children; speak louder and pronounce your words distinctly!"

The author appeared, infinitely small, in the shadow of the dome.

Thereupon the utterance of the players who were collected at the front of the stage, around a naphtha flare, rose more distinctly:

"The Emperor will allow the troops to rest for some weeks at Moscow; then with the rapidity of an eagle he will swoop down upon St. Petersburg."

"Spades, clubs, trump, two points to me."

"There we shall spend the winter, and next

spring we shall penetrate into India, crossing Persia, and the British power will be a thing of the past."

"Thirty-six in diamonds."

"And I the four aces."

"By the way, gentlemen, what say you to the Imperial decree concerning the actors of Paris, dated from the Kremlin? There's an end of the squabbles between Mademoiselle Mars and Mademoiselle Leverd."

"Do look at Fagette," said Nanteuil. "She is charming in that blue Marie-Louise dress trimmed with chinchilla."

Madame Doulce brought out from under her furs a stack of tickets already soiled through having been too frequently offered.

"Master," she said, addressing Constantin Marc, "you know that next Sunday I am to give a reading, with appropriate remarks, of the best letters of Madame de Sévigné, for the benefit of the three poor orphans left by Lacour, the actor, who died this winter in so deplorable a fashion."

"Had he any talent?" asked Constantin Marc.

"None whatever," said Nanteuil.

"Well, then, in what way is his death deplorable?"

"Oh, Master," sighed Madame Doulce, "do not pretend to be unfeeling.

"I am not pretending to be unfeeling. But here is something that surprises me: the value which we set upon the lives of those who are not of the slightest interest to us. We seem as though we believe that life is in itself something precious. Yet nature teaches us plainly enough that nothing is more worthless and contemptible. In former days people were less besmeared with sentimentalism. Each of us held his own life to be infinitely precious, but he did not profess any respect whatever for the life of others. We were nearer to nature in those days. We were created to devour one another. But our debilitated, enervated, hypocritical race wallows in a sly cannibalism. While we are gulping one another down we declare that life is sacred, and we no longer dare to confess that life is murder."

"That life is murder," echoed Chevalier dreamily, without grasping the meaning of the words.

Then he poured forth a string of nebulous ideas:

"Murder and bloodshed, that may be! But amusing bloodshed, and comical murder. Life is a burlesque catastrophe, a terrible comedy, the mask of carnival over blood-stained cheeks. That is what life means to the artist; the artist on the stage, and the artist in action."

Nanteuil uneasily sought a meaning in these confused phrases.

The actor continued excitedly :

" Life is yet another thing : it is the flower and the knife, it is to see red one day and blue the next, it is hatred and love, ravishing, delightful hatred, cruel love."

" Monsieur Chevalier," asked Constantin Marc in the quietest of tones, " does it not seem to you natural to be a murderer, and do you not think that it is merely the fear of being killed that prevents us from killing ? "

Chevalier replied in deep, pensive tones :

" Most certainly not ! It would not be the fear of being killed that would prevent me from killing. I have no fear of death. But I feel a respect for the life of others. I am humane in spite of myself. I have for some time past been seriously considering the question which you have just asked me, Monsieur Constantin Marc. I have pondered over it day and night, and I know now that I could not kill any one."

At this, Nanteuil, filled with joy, cast upon him a look of contempt. She feared him no longer, and she could not forgive him for having alarmed her.

She rose.

" Good evening ; I have a headache. Good-bye till to-morrow, Monsieur Constantin Marc." And she went out briskly.

Chevalier ran after her down the corridor, descended the stage staircase behind her, and rejoined her by the stage doorkeeper's box.

"Félicie, come and dine with me to-night at our cabaret. I should be so glad if you would! Will you?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"Why won't you?"

"Leave me alone; you are bothering me!"

She tried to escape. He detained her.

"I love you so! Don't be too cruel to me!"

Taking a step towards him, her lips curling back from her clenched teeth, she hissed into his ear:

"It's all over, over, over! You hear me? I am fed up with you."

Then, very gently and solemnly, he said:

"It is the last time that we two shall speak together. Listen, Félicie, before there is a tragedy I ought to warn you. I cannot compel you to love me. But I do not intend that you shall love another. For the last time I advise you not to see Monsieur de Ligny again. I shall prevent your belonging to him."

"You will prevent me? You? My poor dear fellow!"

In a still more gentle tone he replied:

"I mean it; I shall do it. A man can get what he wants; only he must pay the price."

CHAPTER V

ETURNING home, Félicie succumbed to a fit of tears. She saw Chevalier once more imploring her in a despairing voice with the look of a poor man. She had heard that voice and seen that expression when passing tramps, worn out with fatigue, on the high road, when her mother, fearing that her lungs were affected, had taken her to spend the winter at Antibes with a wealthy aunt. She despised Chevalier for his gentleness and tranquil manner. But the recollection of that face and that voice disturbed her. She could not eat, she felt as if she were suffocating. In the evening she was attacked by such an excruciating internal pain that she thought she must be dying. She thought this feeling of prostration was due to the fact that it was two days since she had seen Robert. It was only nine o'clock. She hoped that she might find him still at home, and put on her hat.

"Mamma, I have to go to the theatre this evening. I am off."

Out of consideration for her mother, she was in the habit of making such veiled explanations.

"Go, my child, but don't come home too late."

Ligny lived with his parents. He had, on the top floor of the charming house in the Rue Vernet, a small bachelor flat, lit by round windows, which he called his "œil-de-bœuf." Félicie sent word by the hall-porter that a lady was waiting for him in a carriage. Ligny did not care for women to look him up too often in the bosom of his family. His father, who was in the diplomatic service, and deeply engrossed in the foreign interests of the country, remained in an incredible state of ignorance as to what went on in his own house. But Madame de Ligny was determined that the decencies of life should be observed in her home, and her son was careful to satisfy her requirements in the matter of outward appearances, since they never probed to the bottom of things. She left him perfectly free to love where he would, and only rarely, in serious and expansive moments, did she hint that it was to the advantage of young men to cultivate the acquaintance of women of their own class. Hence it was that Robert had always dissuaded Félicie from coming to him in the Rue Vernet. He had rented, in the Boulevard de Villiers, a small house, where they could meet in absolute freedom. But on the present occasion, after two days without

seeing her, he was greatly pleased by her unexpected visit, and he came down immediately.

Leaning back in the cab, they drove through the darkness and the snow, at the quiet pace of their aged hack, through the streets and boulevards, while the darkness of the night cloaked their love-making.

At her door, having seen her home, he said :

"Good-bye till to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow, Boulevard de Villiers. Come early."

She was leaning on him preparatory to stepping down from the cab. Suddenly she started back.

"There ! There ! Among the trees. He has seen us. He was watching us."

"Who, then ?"

"A man—some one I don't know."

She had just recognized Chevalier. She stepped out, rang the bell, and, nestling in Robert's fur coat, waited, trembling, for the door to open. When it was opened, she detained him.

"Robert, see me upstairs. I am frightened."

Not without some impatience, he followed her up the stairs.

Chevalier had waited for Félicie, in the little dining-room, before the armour which she had worn as Jeanne d'Arc, together with Madame Nanteuil,

until one o'clock in the morning. He had left at that hour, and had watched for her on the pavement, and on seeing the cab stop in front of the door he had concealed himself behind a tree. He knew very well that she would return with Ligny ; but when he saw them together it was as if the earth had yawned beneath him, and, so that he should not fall to the ground, he had clutched the trunk of the tree. He remained until Ligny had emerged from the house ; he watched him as, wrapped in his fur coat, he got into the cab, took a couple of steps as if to spring on him, stopped short, and then with long strides went down the boulevard.

He went his way, driven by the rain and wind. Feeling too hot, he doffed his felt hat, and derived a certain pleasure from the sense of the icy drops of water on his forehead. He was vaguely conscious that houses, trees, walls, and lights went past him indefinitely ; he wandered on, dreaming.

He found himself, without knowing how he had got there, on a bridge which he hardly knew. Half-way across it stood the colossal statue of a woman. His mind was now at rest ; he had formed a resolution. It was an old idea, which he had now driven into his brain like a nail, which pierced it through and through. He no longer examined it. He calculated coldly the means of carrying out the

thing he had determined to do. He walked straight ahead at random, absorbed in thought, and as calm as a mathematician.

On the Pont des Arts he became aware that a dog was following him. He was a big, long-haired farm dog, with eyes of different colours, which were full of gentleness, and an expression of infinite distress. Chevalier spoke to him :

" You've no collar. You are not happy. Poor fellow, I can't do anything for you."

By four o'clock in the morning he found himself in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. On seeing the houses of the Boulevard Saint-Michel he experienced a painful impression and abruptly turned back toward the Observatory. The dog had vanished. Near the monument of the Lion of Belfort, Chevalier stopped in front of a deep trench which cut the road in two. Against the bank of excavated earth, under a tarpaulin supported by four stakes, an old man was keeping vigil before a brazier. The lappets of his rabbit-skin cap were down over his ears ; his huge nose was a flaming red. He raised his head ; his eyes, which were watering, seemed wholly white, without pupils, each set in a ring of fire and tears. He was stuffing into the bowl of his cutty a few scraps of canteen tobacco, mixed with bread-crumbs, which did not fill half the bowl of his little pipe.

"Will you have some tobacco, old fellow?" asked Chevalier, offering him his pouch.

The man's answer was slow in coming. His understanding was not quick, and courtesies astonished him. Finally, he opened a mouth which was quite black, and said:

"I won't say no to that."

He half rose from his seat. One of his feet was shod in an old slipper; the other was swathed in rags. Slowly, with hands numb with the cold, he stuffed his pipe. It was snowing, a snow that melted as it fell.

"You will excuse me?" said Chevalier, and he slipped under the tarpaulin and seated himself beside the old man.

From time to time they exchanged a remark.

"Rotten weather!"

"It's what we expect at this season. Winter's hard; summer's better."

"So you look after the job at night, old fellow?"

The old man answered readily when questioned. Before he spoke his throat emitted a long, very gentle murmur.

"I do one thing one day; another thing another. Odd jobs. See?"

"You are not a Parisian?"

"No, I was born in La Creuse. I used to

work as a navvy in the Vosges. I left there the year the Prussians and other foreigners came. There were thousands of them. Can't understand where they all came from. Maybe you've heard of the war of the Prussians, young man ?"

He remained silent for a long spell and then resumed :

"So you are out on a spree, my lad. You don't feel like going back to the works yet ?"

"I am an actor," replied Chevalier.

The old man who did not understand, inquired :

"Where is it, your works ?"

Chevalier was anxious to rouse the old man's admiration.

"I play comedy parts in a big theatre," he said. "I am one of the principal actors at the Odéon. You know the Odéon ?"

The watchman shook his head. No, he did not know the Odéon. After a prolonged silence, he once more opened the black cavern of his mouth :

"And so, young man, you are on the loose. You don't want to go back to the works, eh ?"

Chevalier replied :

"Read the paper the day after to-morrow, you will see my name in it."

The old man tried to discover a meaning in these words, but it was too difficult ; he gave it up, and reverted to his familiar train of thought.

"When once one's off on the loose, it is sometimes for weeks and months."

At daybreak, Chevalier resumed his wanderings. The sky was milky. Heavy wheels were breaking the silence of the paved roads. Voices, here and there, rang through the keen air. The snow was no longer falling. He walked on at haphazard. The spectacle of the city's reviving life made him feel almost cheerful. On the Pont des Arts he stood for a long time watching the Seine flow by, after which he continued on his way. On the Place du Havre he saw an open café. A faint streak of dawn was reddening the front windows. The waiters were sanding the brick pavement and setting out the tables. He flung himself into a chair.

"Waiter, an absinthe."

CHAPTER VI

IN the cab, beyond the fortifications, which were skirted by the deserted boulevard, Félicie and Robert held one another in a close embrace.

"Don't you love your own Félicie? Tell me! Doesn't it flatter your vanity to possess a little woman who makes people cheer and clap her, who is written about in the newspapers? Mamma pastes all my notices in her album. The album is full already."

He replied that he had not waited for her to succeed before discovering how charming she was; and, in fact, their liaison had begun when she was making an obscure first appearance at the Odéon in a revival which had fallen flat.

"When you told me that you wanted me, I didn't keep you waiting, did I? We didn't take long about that! Wasn't I right? You are too sensible to think badly of me because I didn't keep things dragging along. When I saw you for the first time I felt that I was to be yours, so it wasn't worth while delaying. I don't regret it. Do you?"

The cab stopped at a short distance from the fortifications, in front of a garden railing.

This railing, which had not been painted for a long time, stood on a wall faced with pebbles, low and broad enough to permit of children perching themselves on it. It was screened half-way up by a sheet of iron with a toothed edge, and its rusty spikes did not rise more than ten feet above the ground. In the centre, between two pillars of masonry surmounted by cast-iron vases, the railing formed a gate opening in the middle, filled in across its lower part, and furnished, on the inside, with worm-eaten slatted shutters.

They alighted from the cab. The trees of the boulevard, in four straight lines, lifted their frail skeletons in the fog. They heard, through the wide silence, the diminishing rattle of their cab, on its way back to the barrier, and the trotting of a horse coming from Paris.

"How dismal the country is!" she said, with a shiver.

"But, my darling, the Boulevard de Villiers is not the country."

He could not open the gate, and the lock creaked. Irritated by the sound, she said:

"Open it, do: the noise is getting on my nerves."

She noticed that the cab which had come from

Paris had stopped near their house, at about the tenth tree from where she stood; she looked at the thin, steaming horse and the shabby driver, and asked:

"What is that carriage?"

"It's a cab, my pet."

"Why does it stop here?"

"It has not stopped here, it's stopping in front of the next house."

"There is no next house; there's only a vacant lot."

"Well, then, it has stopped in front of a vacant lot. What more can I tell you?"

"I don't see anyone getting out of it."

"The driver is perhaps waiting for a fare."

"What, in front of a vacant lot!"

"Probably, my dear. This lock has got rusty."

She crept along, hiding herself behind the trees, toward the spot where the cab had stopped, and then returned to Ligny, who had succeeded in unlocking the gate.

"Robert, the blinds of the cab are down."

"Well, then, there's a loving couple inside."

"Don't you think there's something queer about that cab?"

"It is not a thing of beauty, but all cabs are ugly. Come in."

"Isn't somebody following us?"

"Whom do you expect to follow us?"

"I don't know. One of your women friends."

But she was not saying what was in her thoughts.

"Do come in, my darling."

When she had entered the garden she said:

"Be sure to close the gate properly, Robert."

Before them stretched a small oval grass-plot. Behind it stood the house, with its flight of three steps, sheltered by a zinc portico, its six windows, and its slate roof.

Ligny had rented it for a year from an old merchant's clerk, who had wearied of it because nocturnal prowlers used to steal his fowls and rabbits. On either side of the grass-plot a gravel path led to the steps. They took the path on the right. The gravel creaked beneath their feet.

"Madame Simonneau has forgotten to close the shutters again," said Ligny.

Madame Simonneau was a woman from Neuilly, who came every morning to clean up.

A large Judas-tree, leaning to one side, and to all appearance dead, stretched one of its round black branches as far as the portico.

"I don't quite like that tree," said Félicie; "its branches are like great snakes. One of them goes almost into our room."

They went up the three front steps; and, while he was looking through his bunch of keys for the

key of the front door, she rested her head on his shoulder.

. . . . . .

Félicie, when unveiling her beauty, displayed a serene pride which made her adorable. She revealed such a quiet satisfaction in her nudity that her chemise, when it fell to her feet, made the onlooker think of a white peacock.

And when Robert saw her in her nakedness, bright as the streams or stars, he said :

"At least you don't make one badger you ! It's curious : there are women, who, even if you don't ask them for anything, surrender themselves completely, go just as far as it's possible to go, yet all the time they won't let you see so much as a finger-breadth of skin."

"Why ?" asked Félicie, playing with the airy threads of her hair.

Robert de Ligny had experience of women. Yet he did not realize what an insidious question this was. He had received some training in moral science, and in replying he derived inspiration from the professors whose classes he had attended.

"It is doubtless a matter of training, religious principles, and an innate feeling which survives even when——"

This was not at all what he ought to have replied, for Félicie, shrugging her shoulders, and

placing her hands upon her smoothly polished hips, interrupted him sharply :

" Well, you are simple ! It's because they've got bad figures ! Training ! Religion ! It makes me boil to hear such rubbish ! Have I been brought up any worse than other women ? Have I less religion than they have ? Tell me, Robert, how many really well-made women have you ever seen ? Just reckon them up on your fingers. Yes, there are heaps of women who won't show their shoulders or anything. Take Fagette ; she won't let even women see her undress ; when she puts a clean chemise on she holds the old one between her teeth. Sure enough, I should do the same if I were built as she is ! "

She relapsed into silence, and, with quiet arrogance, slowly ran the palms of her hands over her sides and her loins, observing proudly :

" And the best of it is that there's not too much of me anywhere."

She was conscious of the charm imparted to her beauty by the graceful slenderness of her outlines.

Now her head, thrown back on the pillow, was bathed in the masses of her golden tresses, which lay streaming in all directions ; her slender body, slightly raised by a pillow slipped beneath her loins, lay motionless at full length ; one gleaming leg was extended along the edge of the bed, ending in a

sharply chiselled foot like the point of a sword. The light from the great fire which had been lit in the fireplace gilded her flesh, casting palpitating lights and shadows over her motionless body, clothing it in mystery and splendour, while her outer clothing and her underlinen, lying on the chairs and the carpet, waited, like a docile flock.

She raised herself on her elbow, resting her cheek in her hand.

"You are the first, really you are, I am not lying: the others don't exist."

He felt no jealousy in respect of the past; he had no fear of comparisons. He questioned her:

"Then the others?"

"To begin with, there were only two: my professor, and he of course doesn't count, and there was the man I told you about, a solid sort of a person, whom my mother saddled me with."

"No more?"

"I swear it."

"And Chevalier?"

"Chevalier? He? Good gracious, no! You wouldn't have had me look at him!"

"And the solid sort of person found by your mother, he, too, does not count any more?"

"I assure you that, with you, I am another woman. It's the solemn truth that you are the first to possess me. It's queer, all the same.

Directly I set eyes on you I wanted you. Quite suddenly I felt I must have you. I felt it somehow. What? I should find it very hard to say. Oh, I didn't stop to think. With your conventional, stiff, frigid manners, and your appearance, like a curly-haired little wolf, you pleased me, that was all! And now I could not do without you. No, indeed, I couldn't."

He assured her that on her surrender he had been deliciously surprised; he said all sorts of pretty, caressing things, all of which had been said before.

Taking his head in her hands, she said:

"You have really the teeth of a wolf. I think it was your teeth that made me want you the first day. Bite me!"

He pressed her to his bosom, and felt her firm supple body respond to his embrace. Suddenly she released herself:

"Don't you hear the gravel creaking?"

"No."

"Listen: I can hear a sound of footsteps on the path."

Sitting upright, her body bent forward, she strained her ears.

He was disappointed, excited, irritated, and perhaps his self-esteem was slightly hurt.

"What has come over you? It's absurd."

She cried very sharply :

" Do hold your tongue ! "

She was listening intently to a slight sound, near at hand, as of breaking branches.

Suddenly she leapt from the bed with such instinctive agility, with a movement so like the rapid spring of a young animal, that Ligny, although by no means of a literary turn of mind, thought of the cat metamorphosed into a woman.

" Are you crazy ? Where are you going ? "

Raising a corner of the curtain, she wiped the moisture from the corner of a pane, and peered out through the window. She saw nothing but the night. The noise had ceased altogether.

During this time, Ligny, lying moodily against the wall, was grumbling :

" As you will, but, if you catch a cold, so much the worse for you ! "

She glided back into bed. At first he remained somewhat resentful ; but she wrapped him about with the delicious freshness of her body.

When they came to themselves they were surprised to see by one of their watches that it was seven o'clock.

Ligny lit the lamp, a paraffin lamp, supported on a column, with a cut-glass container inside which the wick was curled up like a tape-worm. Félicie was very quick in dressing herself. They

had to descend one floor by a wooden staircase, dark and narrow. He went ahead, carrying the lamp, and halted in the passage.

"You go out, darling, before I put the lamp out."

She opened the door, and immediately recoiled with a loud shriek. She had seen Chevalier standing on the outer steps, with arms extended, tall, black, erect as a crucifix. His hand grasped a revolver. The glint of the weapon was not perceptible; nevertheless she saw it quite distinctly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ligny, who was turning down the wick of the lamp.

"Listen, but don't come near me!" cried Chevalier in a loud voice. "I forbid you to belong to one another. This is my dying wish. Good-bye, Félicie."

And he slipped the barrel of the revolver into his mouth.

Crouching against the passage wall, she closed her eyes. When she reopened them, Chevalier was lying on his side, across the doorway. His eyes were wide open, and he seemed to be gazing at them with a smile. A thread of blood was trickling from his mouth over the flagstones of the porch. A convulsive tremor shook his arm. Then he ceased to move. As he lay there, huddled up, he seemed smaller than usual.

On hearing the report of the revolver, Ligny had hurriedly come forward. In the darkness of the night he raised the body, and immediately lowering it gently to the ground he attempted to strike matches, which the wind promptly extinguished. At last, by the flare of one of the matches, he saw that the bullet had carried away part of the skull, that the meninges were laid bare over an area as large as the palm of the hand; this area was grey, oozing blood, and very irregular in shape, its outlines reminding Ligny of the map of Africa. He was conscious of a sudden feeling of respect in the presence of this dead man. Placing his hands under the armpits, he dragged Chevalier with the minutest precautions into the room at the side. Leaving him there, he hurried through the house in quest of Félicie, calling to her.

He found her in the bedroom, with her head buried under the bed-clothes of the unmade bed, crying: "Mamma! Mamma!" and repeating prayers.

"Don't stay here, Félicie."

She went downstairs with him. But, on reaching the hall, she said:

"You know very well that we can't go out that way."

He showed her out by the kitchen door.

CHAPTER VII

EFT alone in the silent house, Robert de Ligny relit the lamp. Serious and even somewhat solemn voices were beginning to speak within him. Moulded from childhood by the rules of moral responsibility, he now experienced a sensation of painful regret, akin to remorse. Reflecting that he had caused the death of this man, albeit without intending it or knowing it, he did not feel wholly innocent. Shreds of his philosophic and religious training came back to him, disturbing his conscience. The phrases of moralists and preachers, learned at school, which had sunk to the very depths of his memory, suddenly rose in his mind. Its inward voices repeated them to him. They said, quoting some old religious orator: "When we abandon ourselves to irregularities of conduct, even to those regarded as least culpable in the opinion of the world, we render ourselves liable to commit the most reprehensible actions. We perceive, from the most frightful examples, that voluptuousness leads to crime."

These maxims, upon which he had never reflected, suddenly assumed for him a precise and austere meaning. He thought the matter over seriously. But since his mind was not deeply religious, and since he was incapable of cherishing exaggerated scruples, he was conscious of only a passable degree of edification, which was steadily diminishing. Before long he decided that such scruples were out of place and that they could not possibly apply to the situation. "When we abandon ourselves to irregularities of conduct, even to those regarded as least culpable in the opinion of the world. . . . We perceive, from the most frightful examples. . . ." These phrases, which only a little while ago had reverberated through his soul like a peal of thunder, he now heard in the snuffling and throaty voices of the professors and priests who had taught them to him, and he found them somewhat ridiculous. By a natural association of ideas he recalled a passage from an ancient Roman history—which he had read, when in the second form, during a certain course of study, and which had impressed itself on his mind—a few lines concerning a lady who was convicted of adultery and accused of having set fire to Rome. "So true it is," ran the historian's comment, "that a person who violates the laws of chastity is capable of any crime." He smiled inwardly at this recollection,

reflecting that the moralists, after all, had queer ideas about life.

The wick, which was charring, gave an insufficient light. He could not manage to snuff it, and it was giving out a horrible stench of paraffin. Thinking of the author of the passage relating to the Roman lady, he said to himself: "Sure enough, it was a queer idea that he got hold of there!"

He felt reassured as to his innocence. His slight feeling of remorse had entirely evaporated, and he was unable to conceive how he could for a moment have believed himself responsible for Chevalier's death. Yet the affair troubled him.

Suddenly he thought: "Supposing he were still alive!"

A while ago, for the space of a second, by the light of a match blown out as soon as it was struck, he had seen the hole in the actor's skull. But what if he had seen incorrectly? What if he had taken a mere graze of the skin for a serious lesion of the brain and skull? Does a man retain his powers of judgment in the first moments of surprise and horror? A wound may be hideous without being mortal, or even particularly serious. It had certainly seemed to him that the man was dead. But was he a medical man, able to judge with certainty?

He lost all patience with the wick, which was still charring, and muttered :

"This lamp is enough to poison one."

Then recalling a trick of speech habitual to Dr. Socrates, as to the origin of which he was ignorant, he repeated mentally :

"This lamp stinks like thirty-six cart-loads of devils."

Instances occurred to him of several abortive attempts at suicide. He remembered having read in a newspaper that a married man, after killing his wife, had, like Chevalier, fired his revolver into his mouth, but had only succeeded in shattering his jaw ; he remembered that at his club a well known sportsman, after a card scandal, tried to blow out his brains but merely shot off an ear. These instances applied to Chevalier with striking exactitude.

"Supposing he were not dead."

He wished and hoped against all evidence that the unfortunate man might still be breathing, that he might be saved. He thought of fetching bandages, of giving first aid. Intending to re-examine the man lying in the front room, he raised the lamp, which was still emitting an insufficient light, too suddenly, and so extinguished it. Whereupon, surprised by the sudden darkness, he lost patience and exclaimed :

"Confound the blasted thing!"

While lighting it again, he flattered himself with the idea that Chevalier, once taken to hospital, would regain consciousness, and would live, and seeing him already on his feet, perched on his long legs, bawling, clearing his throat, sneering, his desire for his recovery became less eager; he was even beginning to cease to desire it, to regard it as annoying and inconsiderate. He asked himself anxiously, with a feeling of real uneasiness:

"What in the world would he do if he came back, that dismal actor fellow? Would he return to the Odéon? Would he stroll through its corridors displaying his great scar? Would he once more have to see him prowling round Félicie?"

He held the lighted lamp close to the body and recognized the livid bleeding wound, the irregular outline of which reminded him of the Africa of his schoolboy maps.

Plainly death had been instantaneous, and he failed to understand how he could for a moment have doubted it.

He left the house and proceeded to stride up and down in the garden. The image of the wound was flashing before his eyes like the impression caused by too bright a light. It moved away from him, increasing in size against the black sky; it took the shape of a pale continent whence he saw

swarms of distracted little blacks pouring forth, armed with bows and arrows.

He decided that the first thing to do was to fetch Madame Simonneau, who lived close at hand, in the Boulevard Bineau, in the residential part of the café. He closed the gâte carefully, and went in search of the housekeeper. Once on the boulevard, he recovered his equanimity. He felt most uncomfortable about the accident; he accepted the accomplished fact, but he cavilled at fate in respect of the circumstances. Since there had to be a death, he gave his consent that there should be one, but he would have preferred another. Toward this one he was conscious of a feeling of disgust and repugnance. He said to himself vaguely:

"I concede a suicide. But what is the good of a ridiculous and declamatory suicide? Couldn't the fellow have killed himself at home? Couldn't he, if his determination was irrevocable, have carried it out discreetly, with proper pride? That is what a gentleman would have done in his position. Then one might have pitied him, and respected his memory."

He recalled word for word his conversation with Félicie in the bedroom an hour before the tragedy. He asked her if she had not for a time been Chevalier's mistress. He had asked her this,

not because he wanted to know, for he had very little doubt of it, but in order to show that he knew it. And she had replied indignantly: "Chevalier? He? Good gracious, no! You wouldn't have had me look at him!"

He did not blame her for having lied. All women lie. He rather enjoyed the graceful and easy manner with which she had cast the fellow out of her past. But he was vexed with her for having given herself to a low-down actor. Chevalier spoilt Félicie for him. Why did she take lovers of that type? Was she wanting in taste? Did she not exercise a certain selection? Did she behave like a woman of the town? Did she lack a certain sense of niceness which warns women as to what they may or may not do? Didn't she know how to behave? Well, this was the sort of thing that happened if women had no breeding. He blamed Félicie for the accident that had occurred and was relieved of a heavy incubus.

Madame Simonneau was not at home. He inquired her whereabouts of the waiters in the café, the grocer's assistants, the girls at the laundry, the police, and the postman. At last, following the direction of a neighbour, he found her poulticing an old lady, for she was a nurse. Her face was purple and she reeked of brandy. He sent her to watch the corpse. He instructed her to cover it

with a sheet, and to hold herself at the disposal of the commissary and the doctor, who would come for the particulars. She replied, somewhat nettled, that she knew, please God, what she had to do. She did indeed know. Madame Simonneau was born in a social circle which is obsequious to the constituted authorities and respects the dead. But when, having questioned Monsieur de Ligny, she learnt that he had dragged the body into the front room, she could not conceal from him that such behaviour was imprudent and might expose him to unpleasantness.

"You ought not to have done it," she told him. "When anyone has killed himself, you must never touch him before the police come."

Ligny thereupon went off to notify the commissary. The first excitement having passed off, he no longer felt any surprise, doubtless because events which, considered from a distance, would seem strange, when they take place before us appear quite natural, as indeed they are. They unfold themselves in an ordinary fashion, falling into place as a succession of petty facts, and eventually losing themselves in the everyday commonplace of life. His mind was distracted from the violent death of an unfortunate fellow-creature by the very circumstances of that death, by the part which he had played in the affair and

the occupation which it had imposed upon him. On his way to the commissary's he felt as calm and as free from mental care as though he had been on his way to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to decipher despatches.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the police commissary entered the garden with his secretary and a policeman. The municipal physician, Monsieur Hibry, arrived simultaneously. Already, thanks to the industry of Madame Simonneau, who was always interested in matters of supply, the house exhaled a violent smell of carbolic and was blazing with the candles which she had lit. Madame Simonneau was bustling to and fro, actuated by an urgent desire to procure a crucifix and a bough of consecrated box-wood for the dead. The doctor examined the corpse by the light of a candle.

He was a bulky man with a ruddy complexion. He breathed noisily. He had just dined.

"The bullet, a large calibre bullet," he said, "penetrated by way of the palatal vault, traversed the brain, and finally fractured the left parietal bone, carrying away a portion of the cerebral substance, and blowing out a piece of the skull. Death was instantaneous."

He returned the candle to Madame Simonneau and continued :

"Splinters of the skull were projected to a certain distance. They will probably be found in the garden. I should conjecture that the bullet was round-nosed. A conical bullet would have caused less destruction."

However, the commissary, Monsieur Josse-Arbrissel, a tall, thin man with a long grey moustache, seemed neither to see nor to hear. A dog was howling outside the garden gate.

"The direction of the wound," said the doctor, "as well as the fingers of the right hand, which are still contracted, are more than ample proof of suicide."

He lit a cigar.

"We are sufficiently informed," remarked the commissary.

"I regret, gentlemen, to have disturbed you," said Robert de Ligny, "and I thank you for the courteous manner in which you have carried out your official duties."

The secretary and the police agent, Madame Simonneau showing the way, carried the body up to the first floor.

Monsieur Josse-Arbrissel was biting his nails and looking into space.

"A tragedy of jealousy," he remarked, "nothing is more common. We have here in Neuilly a steady average of self-inflicted deaths. Out of a hundred suicides thirty are caused by gambling.

The others are due to disappointment in love, poverty, or incurable disease.

"Chevalier?" inquired Dr. Hibry, who was a lover of the theatre. "Chevalier? Wait a minute! I have seen him; I saw him at a benefit performance, at the Variétés. Of course! He recited a monologue."

The dog howled outside the garden gate.

"You cannot imagine," resumed the commissary, "the disasters caused in this municipality by the *pari mutuel*. I am not exaggerating when I assert that at least thirty per cent. of the suicides which I have to look into are caused by gambling. Everybody gambles here. Every hairdresser's shop is a clandestine betting agency. No later than last week a concierge in the Avenue du Roule was found hanging from a tree in the Bois de Boulogne. Now, working men, servants, and junior clerks who gamble do not need to take their own lives. They move to another quarter, they disappear. But a man of position, an official whom gambling has ruined, who is overwhelmed by clamorous creditors, threatened with distraint, and on the point of being dragged before a court of justice, cannot disappear. What is to become of him?"

"I have it!" exclaimed the physician. "He recited *The Duel in the Prairie*. People are rather tired of monologues, but that is very funny. You

remember! 'Will you fight with the sword?' 'No, sir.' 'The pistol?' 'No, sir.' 'The sabre, the knife?' 'No, sir.' 'Ah, then, I see what you want. You are not fastidious. What you want is a duel in the prairie. I agree. We will replace the prairie by a five-storied house. You are permitted to conceal yourself in the vegetation.' Chevalier used to recite *The Duel in the Prairie* in a very humorous manner. He amused me greatly that night. It is true that I am not an ungrateful audience; I worship the theatre.

The commissary was not listening. He was following up his own train of thought.

"It will never be known, how many fortunes and lives are devoured each year by the *pari mutuel*. Gambling never releases its victims; when it has despoiled them of everything, it still remains their only hope. What else, indeed, will permit them to hope?"

He ceased, straining his ear to catch the distant cry of a newsvendor, and rushed out into the avenue in pursuit of the fugitive yelping shadow, hailed him, and snatched from him a sporting paper, which he spread out under the light of a gas-lamp, scanning its pages for certain names of horses: *Fleur-des-pois*, *La Châtelaine*, *Lucrèce*. With haggard eyes, trembling hands, dumbfounded, crushed, he dropped the sheet: his horse had not won.

And Dr. Hibry, observing him from a distance, reflected that some day, in his capacity of physician to the dead, he might well be called upon to certify the suicide of his commissary of police, and he made up his mind in advance to conclude, as far as possible, that his death was due to accidental causes.

Suddenly he seized his umbrella.

"I must be off," he said. "I have been given a seat for the Opéra-Comique to-night. It would be a pity to waste it."

Before leaving the house, Ligny asked Madame Simonneau :

"Where have you put him ?"

"In the bed," replied Madame Simonneau. "It was more decent."

He made no objection, and raising his eyes to the front of the house, he saw at the windows of the bedroom, through the muslin curtains, the light of the two candles which the housekeeper had placed on the bedside table.

"Perhaps," he said, "one might get a nun to watch by him."

"It's not necessary," replied Madame Simonneau, who had invited some neighbours of her own sex, and had ordered her wine and meat. "It's not necessary, I will watch by him myself."

Ligny did not press the point.

The dog was still howling outside the gate.

Returning on foot to the barrier, he noticed, over Paris, a reddish glow which filled the whole sky. Above the chimney-pots the factory chimneys rose grotesque and black, against this fiery mist, seeming to look down with a ridiculous familiarity upon the mysterious conflagration of a world. The few passers-by whom he met on the boulevard strolled along quietly, without raising their heads. Although he knew that when cities are wrapped in night the moist atmosphere often reflects the lights, becoming tinged with this uniform glow, which shines without a flicker, he fancied that he was looking at the reflection of a vast fire. He accepted, without reflection, the idea that Paris was sinking into the abyss of a prodigious conflagration; he found it natural that the private catastrophe in which he had become involved should be merged into a public disaster and that this same night should be for a whole population, as for him, a night of sinister happenings.

Being extremely hungry, he took a cab at the barrier, and had himself driven to a restaurant in the Rue Royale. In the bright, warm room he was conscious of a sense of well-being. After ordering his meal, he opened an evening newspaper and saw, in the Parliamentary report, that his Minister had delivered a speech. On reading it, he smothered a slight laugh; he remembered

certain stories told at the Quai d'Orsay. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was enamoured of Madame de Neuilles, an elderly lady with a lurid past, whom public rumour had raised to the status of adventuress and spy. He was wont, it was whispered, to try on her the speeches which he was to deliver in the Chamber. Ligny, who had formerly been to a certain small extent the lover of Madame de Neuilles, pictured to himself the statesman in his shirt reciting to his lady-love the following statement of principles: "Far be it from me to disregard the legitimate susceptibilities of the national sentiment. Resolutely pacific, but jealous of France's honour, the Government will, etc." This vision put him in a merry mood. He turned the page, and read: To-morrow at the Odéon, first performance (in this theatre) of *La Nuit du 23 octobre 1812* with Messieurs Durville, Maury, Romilly, Destrée, Vicar, Léon Clim, Valroche, Aman, Chevalier. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

AT one o'clock on the following day *La Grille* was in rehearsal, for the first time, in the green-room of the theatre. A dismal light spread like a pall over the grey stones of the roof, the galleries, and the columns. In the depressing majesty of this pallid architecture, beneath the statue of Racine, the leading actors were reading before Pradel, the manager of the house, their parts, which they did not yet know. Romilly, the stage manager, and Constantine Marc, the author of the piece, were all three seated on a red velvet sofa, while, from a bench set back between two columns, was exhaled the vigilant hatred and whispered jealousy of the actresses left out of the cast.

The lover, Paul Delage, was with difficulty deciphering a speech :

"'I recognize the château with its brick walls, its slated roof; the park, where I have so often entwined her initials and mine on the bark of the trees; the pond whose slumbering waters . . .'"

Fagette rebuked him :

"'Beware, Aimeri, lest the château know you not again, lest the park forget your name, lest the pond murmur: "Who is this stranger?"'"

But she had a cold, and was reading from a manuscript copy full of mistakes.

"Don't stand there, Fagette: it's the summer-house," said Romilly.

"How do you expect me to know that?"

"There's a chair put there."

"'Lest the pond murmur: "Who is this stranger?"'"

"Mademoiselle Nanteuil, it's your cue—— Where has Nanteuil got to? Nanteuil!"

Nanteuil came forward muffled up in her furs, her little bag and her part in her hand, white as a sheet, her eyes sunken, her legs nerveless. When fully awake she had seen the dead man enter her bedroom.

She inquired:

"Where do I make my entrance from?"

"From the right."

"All right."

And she read:

"'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning, I do not know why it was. Can you perhaps tell me?'"

Delage read his reply:

"'It may be, Cécile, that it was due to a special dispensation of Providence or of fate. The God who loves you suffers you to smile, in the hour of weeping and the gnashing of teeth.'"

"Nanteuil, my darling, you cross the stage," said Romilly. "Delage, stand aside a bit to let her pass."

Nanteuil crossed over.

"'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri? Our days are what we make them. They are terrible for evil-doers only.'"

Romilly interrupted:

"Delage, efface yourself a trifle; be careful not to hide her from the audience. Once more, Nanteuil."

Nanteuil repeated:

"'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri? Our days are what we make them. They are terrible for evil-doers only.'"

Constantin Marc no longer recognized his handiwork, he could no longer even hear the sound of his beloved phrases, which he had so often repeated to himself in the Vivarais woods. Dumbfounded and dazed, he held his peace.

Nanteuil tripped daintily across the stage, and resumed reading her part:

"'You will perhaps think me very foolish, Aimeri; in the convent where I was brought up, I often used to envy the fate of the victims.'"

Delage took up his cue, but he had overlooked a page of the manuscript :

"'The weather is magnificent. Already the guests are strolling about the garden.'"

It became necessary to start all over again.

"'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri . . .'"

And so they proceeded, without troubling to understand, but careful to regulate their movements, as if studying the figures of a dance.

"In the interests of the play, we shall have to make some cuts," said Pradel to the dismayed author.

And Delage continued :

"'Do not blame me, Cécile : I felt for you a friendship dating from childhood, one of those fraternal friendships which impart to the love which springs from them a disquieting appearance of incest.'"

"Incest," shouted Pradel. "You cannot let the word 'incest' remain, Monsieur Constantin Marc. The public has susceptibilities of which you have no idea. Moreover, the order of the two speeches which follow must be transposed. The optics of the stage require it."

The rehearsal was interrupted. Romilly caught sight of Durville who, in a recess, was telling racy stories.

"Durville, you can go. The second act will not be rehearsed to-day."

Before leaving, the old actor went up to Nanteuil, to press her hand. Judging that this was the moment to assure her of his sympathy, he summoned up the tears to his eyes, as anyone condoling with her would have done in his place. But he did it admirably. The pupils of his eyes swam in their orbits, like the moon amid clouds. The corners of his lips were turned down in two deep furrows which prolonged them to the bottom of his chin. He appeared to be genuinely afflicted.

"My poor darling," he sighed, "I pity you, I do indeed! To see one for whom one has experienced a—feeling—with whom one has—lived in intimacy—to see him carried off at a blow—a tragic blow—is hard, is terrible!"

And he extended his compassionate hands. Nanteuil, completely unnerved, and crushing her tiny handkerchief and her part in her hands, turned her back upon him, and hissed between her teeth:

"Old idiot!"

Fagette passed her arm round her waist, and led her gently aside to the foot of Racine's statue, where she whispered into her ear:

"Listen to me, my dear. This affair must be completely hushed up. Everybody is talking about it. If you let people talk, they will brand you for life as Chevalier's widow."

Then, being something of a talker, she added:

"I know you, I am your best friend. I know your value. But beware, Félicie: women are held at their own valuation."

Every one of Fagette's shafts told. Nanteuil, with fiery cheeks, held back her tears. Too young to possess or even to desire the prudence which comes to celebrated actresses when of an age to graduate as women of the world of fashion, she was full of self-esteem, and since she had known what it was to love another she was eager to efface everything unfashionable from her past; she felt that Chevalier, in killing himself for her sake, had behaved towards her publicly with a familiarity which made her ridiculous. Still unaware that all things fall into oblivion, and are lost in the swift current of our days, that all our actions flow like the waters of a river, between banks that have no memory, she pondered, irritated and dejected, at the feet of Jean Racine, who understood her grief.

"Just look at her," said Madame Marie-Claire to young Delage. "She wants to cry. I understand her. A man killed himself for me. I was greatly upset by it. He was a count."

"Well, begin again!" shouted Pradel. "Come now, Mademoiselle Nanteuil, your cue!"

Whereupon Nanteuil:

"'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning . . .'"

Suddenly, Madame Doulce appeared. Ponderous and mournful, she let fall the following words :

"I have very sad news. The parish priest will not allow him to enter his church."

As Chevalier had no relations left other than a sister, a working-woman at Pantin, Madame Doulce had undertaken to make arrangements for the funeral at the expense of the members of the company.

They gathered round her. She continued :

"The Church rejects him as though he were accurst ! That's dreadful ! "

"Why ? " asked Romilly.

Madame Doulce replied in a very low tone and as if reluctantly :

"Because he committed suicide."

"We must see to this," said Pradel.

Romilly displayed an eager desire to be of service.

"The curé knows me," he said. He is a very decent fellow. I'll just run over to Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, and I'd be greatly surprised if—— "

Madame Doulce shook her head sadly :

"All is useless."

"All the same, we must have a religious service," said Romilly, with all the authority of a stage-manager.

"Quite so," said Madame Doulce.

Madame Marie-Claire, deeply exercised in her mind, was of opinion that the priests could be compelled to say a Mass.

"Let us keep cool," said Pradel, caressing his venerable beard. "Under Louis VIII the people broke in the doors of Saint-Roch, which had been closed to the coffin of Mademoiselle Raucourt. We live in other times, and under different circumstances. We must have recourse to gentler methods."

Constantin Marc, seeing to his great regret that his play was abandoned, had likewise approached Madame Doulce; he inquired of her:

"Why should you want Chevalier to be blessed by the Church? Personally, I am a Catholic. With me, it is not a faith, it is a system, and I look upon it as a duty to participate in all the external practices of worship. I am on the side of all authorities. I am for the judge, the soldier, the priest. I cannot therefore be suspected of favouring civil burials. But I hardly understand why you persist in offering the curé of Saint-Êtienne-du-Mont a dead body which he repudiates. Now why do you want this unfortunate Chevalier to go to church?"

"Why?" replied Madame Doulce. "For the salvation of his soul and because it is more seemly."

"What would be seemly," replied Constantin Marc, "would be to obey the laws of the Church, which excommunicates suicides."

"Monsieur Constantin Marc, have you read *Les Soirées de Neuilly?*" inquired Pradel, who was an ardent collector of old books and a great reader. "What, you have not read *Les Soirées de Neuilly*, by Monsieur de Fongeray? You have missed something. It is a curious book, which can still be met with sometimes on the quays. It is adorned by a lithograph of Henry Monnier's, which is, I don't know why, a caricature of Stendhal. Fongeray is the pseudonym of two Liberals of the Restoration, Dittmer and Cavé. The work consists of comedies and dramas which cannot be acted, but which contain some most interesting scenes representing manners and customs. You will read in it how, in the reign of Charles X, a vicar of one of the Paris churches, the Abbé Mouchaud, would refuse burial to a pious lady, and would, at all costs, grant it to an atheist. Madame d'Hautefeuille was religious, but she held some national property. At her death, she received the ministrations of a Jansenist priest. For this reason, after her death, the Abbé Mouchaud refused to receive her into the church in which she had passed her life. At the same time, in the same parish, Monsieur Dubourg, a big banker, was good enough to die. In his will he stipulated that he

should be borne straight to the cemetery. 'He is a Catholic,' reflected the Abbé Mouchaud, 'he belongs to us.' Quickly making a parcel of his stole and surplice, he rushed off to the dead man's house, administered extreme unction, and brought him into his church."

"Well," replied Constantin Marc, "that vicar was an excellent politician. Atheists are not formidable enemies of the Church. They do not count as adversaries. They cannot raise a Church against her, and they do not dream of doing so. Atheists have existed at all times among the heads and princes of the Church, and many of them have rendered signal services to the Papacy. On the other hand, whoever does not submit strictly to ecclesiastical discipline and breaks away from tradition upon a single point, whoever sets up a faith against the faith, an opinion, a practice, against the accepted opinion and the common practice, is a factor of disorder, a menace of peril, and must be extirpated. This the vicar, Mouchaud, understood, He should have been made a Cardinal."

Madame Doulce, who had been clever enough not to tell everything in a breath, went on to say:

"I did not allow myself to be discomfited by the opposition of Monsieur le Curé. I begged, I entreated. And his answer was: 'We owe respectful obedience to the Ordinary. Go to the

Archbishop's Palace. I will do as Monseigneur bids me.' There is nothing left for me but to follow this advice. I'm hurrying off to the Archbishop's Palace."

"Let us get to work," said Pradel.

Romilly called to Nanteuil:

"Nanteuil! Come, Nanteuil, begin your whole scene over again."

"And Nanteuil said once more:

"'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning . . .'"

CHAPTER IX

HE prominence given by the Press to the suicide of the Boulevard de Villiers rendered the negotiations between the Stage and the Church all the more difficult. The reporters had given the fullest details of the event, and it was pointed out by the Abbé Mirabelle, the Archbishop's second vicar, that to open the doors of the parish church to Chevalier, as matters then stood, was to proclaim that excommunicated persons were entitled to the prayers of the Church.

But for that matter, Monsieur Mirabelle himself, who in this affair displayed great wisdom and circumspection, paved the way to a solution.

"You must fully understand," he observed to Madame Doulce, "that the opinion of the newspapers cannot affect our decision. We are absolutely indifferent to it, and we do not disturb ourselves in the slightest degree, no matter what fifty public sheets may say about the unfortunate young fellow. Whether the journalists have told the truth or distorted it is their affair, not mine. I do not know

and I do not wish to know what they have written. But the fact of the suicide is notorious. You cannot dispute it. It would now be advisable to investigate closely, and by the light of science, the circumstances in which the deed was committed. Do not be surprised by my thus invoking the aid of science. Science has no better friend than religion. Now medical science may in the present case be of great assistance to us. You will understand in a moment. Mother Church ejects the suicide from her bosom only when his act is an act of despair. The madmen who attempt their own lives are not those who have lost all hope, and the Church does not deny them her prayers; she prays for all who are unfortunate. Now, if it could be proved that this poor boy had acted under the influence of a high fever or of a mental disorder, if a medical man were in a position to certify that the poor fellow was not in possession of his faculties when he slew himself with his own hand, there would be no obstacle to the celebration of a religious service."

Having hearkened to the words of Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle, Madame Doulce hastened back to the theatre. The rehearsal of *La Grille* was over. She found Pradel in his office with a couple of young actresses, one of whom was soliciting an engagement, the other, leave of absence. He refused, in conformity with his principle never to grant a

request until he had first refused it. In this way he bestowed a value upon his most trifling concessions. His glistening eyes and his patriarchal beard, his manner, at once amorous and paternal, gave him a resemblance to Lot, as we see him between his two daughters in the prints of the Old Masters. Standing on the table was an amphora of gilt pasteboard which fostered this illusion.

"It can't be done," he was telling each of them. "It really can't be done, my child—— Well, after all, look in to-morrow."

Having dismissed them, he inquired, as he signed some letters :

"Well, Madame Doulce, what news do you bring ?"

Constantin Marc, appearing with Nanteuil, hastily exclaimed :

"What about my scenery, Monsieur Pradel ?"

Thereupon he described for the twentieth time the landscape, upon which the curtain ought to rise.

"In the foreground, an old park. The trunks of the great trees, on the north side, are green with moss. The dampness of the soil must be felt."

And the manager replied :

"You may rest assured that everything that can be done will be done, and that it will be most appropriate. Well, Madame Doulce, what news ?"

"There is a glimmer of hope," she replied.

"At the back, in a slight mist," said the author, "the grey stones and the slate roofs of the Abbaye-aux-Dames."

"Quite so. Pray be seated, Madame Doulce; you have my attention."

"I was most courteously received at the Archbishop's Palace," said Madame Doulce.

"Monsieur Pradel, it is imperative that the walls of the Abbaye should appear inscrutable, of great thickness, and yet subtilized by the mists of coming night. A pale-gold sky——"

"Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle," resumed Madame Doulce, "is a priest of the highest distinction——"

"Monsieur Marc, are you particularly keen on your pale-gold sky?" inquired the stage manager. "Go on, Madame Doulce, go on, I am listening to you."

"And exquisitely polite. He made a delicate allusion to the indiscretions of the newspapers——"

At this moment Monsieur Marchegeay, the stage manager, burst into the room. His green eyes were glittering, and his red moustache was dancing like a flame. The words rolled off his tongue:

"They are at it again! Lydie, the little super, is screaming like a stoat on the stairs. She says Delage tried to violate her. It's at least the tenth

time in a month that she has come out with that story. This is an infernal nuisance!"

"Such conduct cannot be tolerated in a house like this," said Pradel. "You'll have to fine Delage. Pray continue, Madame Doulce."

"Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle explained to me in the clearest manner that suicide is an act of despair."

But Constantin Marc was inquiring of Pradel with interest, whether Lydie, the little super, was pretty.

"You have seen her in *La Nuit du 23 octobre*; she plays the woman of the people who, in the Plaine de Grenelle, is buying wafers of Madame Ravaud."

"A very pretty girl, to my thinking," said Constantin Marc.

"Undoubtedly," responded Pradel. "But she would be still prettier if her ankles weren't like stakes."

And Constantin Marc musingly replied:

"And Delage has outraged her. That fellow possesses the sense of love. Love is a simple and primitive act. It's a struggle, it's hatred. Violence is necessary to it. Love by mutual consent is merely a tedious obligation."

And he cried, greatly excited:

"Delage is prodigious!"

"Don't get yourself into a fix," said Pradel.

"This same little Lydie entices my actors into her dressing-room, and then all of a sudden she screams out that she is being outraged in order to get hush-money out of them. It's her lover who has taught her the trick, and takes the coin. You were saying, Madame Doulce——"

"After a long and interesting conversation," resumed Madame Doulce, "Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle suggested a favourable solution. He gave me to understand that, in order to remove all difficulties, it would be sufficient for a physician to certify that Chevalier was not in full possession of his faculties, and that he was not responsible for his acts."

"But," observed Pradel, "Chevalier wasn't insane. He was in full possession of his faculties."

"It's not for us to say," replied Madame Doulce. "What do we know about it?"

"No," said Nanteuil, "he was not in full possession of his faculties."

Pradel shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, it's possible. Insanity and reason, it's a matter of appreciation. To whom could we apply for a certificate?"

Madame Doulce and Pradel called to mind three physicians in succession; but they were unable to find the address of the first; the second was bad-tempered, and it was decided that the third was dead.

Nanteuil suggested that they should approach Dr. Trublet.

"That's an idea!" exclaimed Pradel. "Let us ask a certificate of Dr. Socrates. What's to-day? Friday. It's his day for consultations. We shall find him at home."

Dr. Trublet lived in an old house at the top of the Rue de Seine. Pradel took Nanteuil with him, with the idea that Socrates would refuse nothing to a pretty woman. Constantin Marc, who could not live, when in Paris, save in the company of theatrical folk, accompanied them. The Chevalier affair was beginning to amuse him. He found it theatrical, that is, appropriate to theatrical performers. Although the hour for consultations was over, the doctor's sitting-room was still full of people in search of healing. Trublet dismissed them, and received his theatrical friends in his private room. He was standing in front of a table encumbered with books and papers. An adjustable arm-chair, infirm and cynical, displayed itself by the window. The director of the Odéon set forth the object of his call, and ended by saying:

"Chevalier's funeral service cannot be celebrated in the church unless you certify that the unfortunate young man was not altogether sane."

Dr. Trublet declared that Chevalier might very well do without a religious service.

"Adrienne Lecouvreur, who was of more account than Chevalier, did without one. Mademoiselle Monime had no Mass said for her after her death, and, as you are aware, she was denied 'the honour of rotting in a nasty cemetery in the company of all the beggars of the quarter.' She was none the worse off for that."

"You are not ignorant of the fact, Dr. Socrates," replied Pradel, "that actors and actresses are the most religious of people. My company would be deeply grieved if they could not be present at the celebration of a Mass for their colleague. They have already secured the co-operation of several lyric artists, and the music will be very fine."

"Now that's a reason," said Trublet. "I do not gainsay it. Charles Monselet, who was a witty fellow, was reflecting, only a few hours before his death, on his musical Mass. 'I know a great many singers at the Opéra,' he said. 'I shall have a *Pie Jésu aux truffes.*' But, as on this occasion the Archbishop does not authorize a spiritual concert, it would be more convenient to postpone it to some other occasion."

"As far as I am concerned," replied the director, "I have no religious belief. But I consider that the Church and the Stage are two great social powers, and that it is beneficial that they should be friends and allies. For my own part, I never lose

an opportunity of sealing the alliance. This coming Lent, I shall have Durville read one of Bourdaloue's sermons. I receive a State subsidy. I must observe the Concordat. Moreover, whatever people may say, Catholicism is the most acceptable form of religious indifference."

"Well then," objected Constantin Marc, "since you wish to show deference to the Church, why do you foist upon her, by force or by subterfuge, a coffin which she doesn't want?"

The doctor spoke in a similar strain, and ended by saying:

"My dear Pradel, don't you have anything more to do with the matter."

Whereupon Nanteuil, her eyes blazing, her voice sibilant, cried:

"He must go to church, doctor; sign what is asked of you, write that he was not in possession of his faculties, I entreat you."

There was not religion alone at the back of this desire. Blended with it was an intimate feeling, an obscure background of old beliefs, of which she herself was unaware. She hoped that if he were carried into the church, and sprinkled with holy water, Chevalier would be appeased, would become one of the peaceful dead, and would no longer torment her. She feared, on the other hand, that if he were deprived of benediction and prayers he

would perpetually hover about her, accursed and maleficent. And, more simply still, in her dread of seeing him again, she was anxious that the priests should take good care to bury him, and that everybody should attend the funeral, so that he should be all the more thoroughly buried; as thoroughly buried, in short, as it was possible to be. Her lips trembled and she wrung her hands.

Trublet, who had long graduated in human nature, watched her with interest. He understood and took a special interest in the female of the human machine. This particular specimen filled him with joy. His snub-nosed face beamed with delight as he watched her.

"Don't be uneasy, child. There is always a way of coming to an understanding with the Church. What you are asking me is not within my powers; I am a lay doctor. But we have to-day, thank God, religious physicians who send their patients to the ecclesiastical waters, and whose special function is to attest miraculous cures. I know one who lives in this part of the town; I'll give you his address. Go and see him; the Bishop will refuse him nothing. He will arrange the matter for you."

"Not at all," said Pradel. "You always attended poor Chevalier. It is for you to give a certificate."

Romilly agreed:

"Of course, doctor. You are the physician to the theatre. We must wash our dirty linen at home."

At the same time, Nanteuil turned upon Socrates a gaze of entreaty.

"But," objected Trublet, "what do you want me to say?"

"It's very simple," Pradel replied. "Say that he was to a certain extent irresponsible."

"You are simply asking me to speak like a police surgeon. It's expecting too much of me."

"You believe then, doctor, that Chevalier was fully and entirely morally responsible?"

"Quite the contrary. I am of opinion that he was not in the least responsible for his actions."

"Well, then?"

"But I also consider that, in this respect, he differed in nowise from you, myself, and all other men. My judicial colleagues distinguish between individual responsibilities. They have procedures by which they recognize full responsibilities, and those which lack one or more fractional parts. It is a remarkable fact, moreover, that in order to get a poor wretch condemned they always find him fully responsible. May we not therefore consider that their own responsibility is full—like the moon?"

And Dr. Socrates proceeded to unfold before

the astonished stage folk a comprehensive theory of universal determinism. He went back to the origins of life, and, like the Silenus of Virgil, who, smeared with the juice of mulberries, sang to the shepherds of Sicily and the naiad Aglaia of the origin of the world, he broke out into a flood of words :

"To call upon a poor wretch to answer for his actions ! Why, even when the solar system was still no more than a pale nebula, forming, in the ether, a fragile halo, whose circumference was a thousand times greater than the orbit of Neptune, we had all of us, for ages past, been fully conditioned, determined and irrevocably destined, and your responsibility, my dear child, my responsibility, Chevalier's, and that of all men, had been, not mitigated, but abolished beforehand. All our movements, the result of previous movements of matter, are subject to the laws which govern the cosmic forces, and the human mechanism is merely a particular instance of the universal mechanism."

Pointing to a locked cupboard, he proceeded :

"I have there, contained in bottles, that which would transform, destroy, or excite to frenzy the will of fifty thousand men."

"Wouldn't be playing the game," objected Pradel.

"I agree, it wouldn't be playing the game.

But these substances are not essentially laboratory products. The laboratory combines, it does not create anything. These substances are scattered throughout nature. In their free state, they surround and enter into us, they determine our will: they circumscribe our freedom of device, which is merely the illusion engendered within us by the ignorance of our determinations."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Pradel, taken aback.

"I mean that our will is an illusion caused by our ignorance of the causes which compel us to exert our will. That which wills within us is not ourselves, but myriads of cells of prodigious activity, of which we know nothing, which are unaware of us, which are ignorant of one another, but which nevertheless constitute us. By means of their restlessness they produce innumerable currents which we call our passions, our thoughts, our joys, our sufferings, our desires, our fears, and our will. We believe that we are our own masters, while a mere drop of alcohol stimulates, and then benumbs the very elements by which we feel and will."

Constantin Marc interrupted the physician:

"Excuse me! Since you are speaking of the action of alcohol, I should like your advice on the subject. I am in the habit of drinking a small

glass of Armagnac brandy after each meal. That's not too much, is it?"

"It's a great deal too much. Alcohol is a poison. If you have a bottle of brandy at home, fling it out of the window."

Pradel was pondering. He considered that in suppressing will and responsibility in all human things Dr. Socrates was doing him a personal injury.

"You may say what you like. Will and responsibility are not illusions. They are tangible and powerful realities. I know how the terms of my contract bind me, and I impose my will on others."

And he added with some bitterness:

"I believe in the will, in moral responsibility, in the distinction between good and evil. Doubtless these are, according to you, stupid ideas."

"They are indeed stupid ideas," replied the physician, "but they are very suitable to us, since we are mere animals. We are for ever forgetting this. They are stupid, venerable, wholesome ideas. Men have felt that, without these ideas, they would all go mad. They had only the choice between stupidity and madness. Very reasonably they chose stupidity. Such is the foundation of moral ideas."

"What a paradox!" exclaimed Romilly.

The physician calmly proceeded :

"The distinction between good and evil in human societies has never emerged from the grossest empiricism. It was constituted in a wholly practical spirit and as a simple convenience. We do not trouble ourselves about it where cut-glass or a tree is concerned. We practise moral indifference with regard to animals. We practise it in the case of savage races. This enables us to exterminate them without remorse. That's what is known as the colonial policy. Nor do we find that believers exact a high degree of morality from their god. In the present state of society, they would not willingly admit that he was lecherous or compromised himself with women ; but they do think it fitting that he should be vindictive and cruel. Morality is a mutual agreement to keep what we possess : land, houses, furniture, women, and our lives. It does not imply, in the case of those who bow to it, any particular intelligence or character. It is instinctive and ferocious. Written law follows it closely, and is in more or less harmonious agreement with it. Hence we see that great-hearted men, or men of brilliant genius, have almost all been accused of impiety, and, like Socrates, the son of Phenaretes, and Benoît Malon, have been smitten by the tribunals of their country. And it may be stated that a man who has not, at

the very least, been sentenced to imprisonment does little credit to the land of his fathers."

"There are exceptions," remarked Pradel.

"Few," replied Dr. Trublet.

But Nanteuil, pursuing her idea, remarked:

"My little Socrates, you can very well certify that he was insane. It is the truth. He was not sane. I know it only too well."

"No doubt he was mad, my dear child. But it is a question of determining whether he was madder than other men. The entire history of humanity, replete with tortures, ecstasies, and massacres, is the history of raving, demented creatures."

"Doctor," inquired Constantin Marc, "are you by chance one of those who do not admire War? It is nevertheless a magnificent thing, when you come to think of it. The animals merely eat one another. Men have conceived the idea of beautiful massacres. They have learnt to kill one another in glittering cuirasses, in helmets topped with plumes, or maned with scarlet. By the use of artillery, and the art of fortification, they have introduced chemistry and mathematics among the necessary means of destruction. War is a sublime invention. And, since the extermination of human beings appears to us the only object of life, the wisdom of man resides in this, that he has made

this extermination a delight and a splendour. After all, doctor, you cannot deny that murder is a law of nature, and that it is consequently divine."

To which Dr. Socrates replied :

"We are only miserable animals, and yet we are our own providence and our own gods. The lower animals, whose immemorial reign preceded our own upon this planet, have transformed it by their genius and their courage. The insects have traced roads, excavated the soil, hollowed the trunks of trees and rocks, built dwellings, founded cities, metamorphosed the soil, the air, and the waters. The labour of the humblest of these, that of the madrepores, has created islands and continents. Every material change produces a moral change, since morals depend upon environment. The transformation to which man in his turn has subjected the earth is undoubtedly more profound and more harmonious than the transformation wrought by other animals. Why should not humanity succeed in changing nature to the extent of making it pacific ? Why should not humanity, miserably puny though it is and will be, succeed, some day, in suppressing, or at least in controlling the struggle for life ? Why indeed should not humanity abolish the law of murder ? We may expect a great deal from chemistry. Yet I do not guarantee anything. It is possible that our race

will persist in melancholy, delirium, mania, dementia, and stupor until its lamentable end amid ice and darkness. This world is perhaps irremediably wicked. At all events, I shall have got plenty of amusement out of it. It affords those who are in it an interesting spectacle, and I am beginning to think that Chevalier was madder than the rest in that he voluntarily left his seat."

Nanteuil took a pen from the desk, and held it out, dipped in ink, to the doctor.

He began to write :

"Having been called on several occasions to attend——"

He interrupted himself to ask Chevalier's Christian name.

"Aimé," replied Nanteuil.

"Aimé Chevalier, I have noticed in his system certain disorders of sensibility, vision and motor control, ordinary indications of——"

He went to fetch a book from a shelf of his library.

"It's a thousand chances that I shall find something to confirm my diagnosis in the lectures of Professor Ball on mental diseases."

He turned over the leaves of the book.

"Just see, my dear Romilly, this is what I find to begin with ; in the eighteenth lecture, page 389 : 'Many madmen are to be met with among actors.'

This remark of Professor Ball's reminds me that the celebrated Cabanis one day asked Dr. Esprit Blanche whether the stage was not a cause of madness."

"Really?" asked Romilly uneasily.

"Not a doubt of it," replied Trublet. "But listen to what Professor Ball says on the same page: 'It is an incontestable fact that medical men are excessively predisposed to mental aberration.' Nothing is truer. Among medical men, those who are more especially predestined to insanity are the alienists. It is often difficult to determine which of the two is the crazier, the madman or his doctor. People say too that men of genius are prone to insanity. That is certainly the case. Still, a man is not a reasoning being merely because he is an idiot."

After glancing a little further through the pages of Professor Ball's lectures, he resumed his writing:

"Ordinary indications of maniacal excitement, and, if it be taken into consideration that the subject was of a neuropathic temperament, there is reason to believe that his constitution predisposed him to insanity, which, according to the highest authorities, is merely an exaggeration of the habitual temperament of the individual, and hence it is not possible to credit him with full moral responsibility."

He signed the sheet and handed it to Pradel, saying:

"Here's something that is innocuous and too devoid of meaning to contain the slightest falsehood."

Pradel rose and said:

"Believe me, my dear doctor, we should not have asked you to tell a lie."

"Why not? I am a medical man. I keep a lie-shop. I relieve, I console. How is it possible to relieve and console without lying?"

Then, with a sympathetic glance at Nanteuil, he added:

"Only women and physicians know how necessary untruthfulness is, and how beneficial to man."

And, as Pradel, Constantin Marc, and Romilly were taking their leave, he said:

"Pray go out by the dining-room. I've just received a small cask of old Armagnac. You'll tell me what you think of it!"

Nanteuil had remained behind in the doctor's consulting room.

"My little Socrates, I have spent an awful night. I saw him."

"During your sleep?"

"No, when wide awake."

"You are sure you were not sleeping?"

"Quite sure."

He was on the point of asking her if the apparition had spoken to her. But he left the question

unspoken, fearing lest he might suggest to so sensitive a subject those hallucinations of the sense of hearing, which, by reason of their imperious nature, he dreaded far more than visual hallucinations. He was familiar with the docility of the sick in obeying orders given them by voices. Abandoning the idea of questioning Félicie, he resolved, at all hazards, to remove any scruples of conscience which might be troubling her. At the same time, having observed that, generally speaking, the sense of moral responsibility is weak in women, he made no great effort in that direction, and contented himself with remarking lightly :

"My dear child, you must not consider yourself responsible for the death of that poor fellow. A suicide inspired by passion is the inevitable termination of a pathological condition. Every individual who commits suicide had to commit suicide. You are merely the incidental cause of an accident, which is, of course, deplorable, but the importance of which should not be exaggerated."

Thinking that he had said enough on this score, he applied himself immediately to dispersing the terrors which surrounded her. He sought to convince her by simple arguments that she was beholding images which had no reality, mere reflections of her own thoughts. In order to illustrate

his demonstration, he told her a story of a reassuring nature :

"An English physician," he told her, "was attending a lady, like yourself, highly intelligent, who, like yourself, was in the habit of seeing cats under her furniture, and was visited by phantoms. He convinced her that these apparitions corresponded to nothing in reality. She believed him, and worried herself no longer. One fine day, after a long period of retirement, she reappeared in society, and on entering a drawing-room she saw the lady of the house who, pointing to an arm-chair, begged her to be seated. She also saw, seated in this chair, a crafty-looking old gentleman. She argued to herself that one of the two persons was necessarily a creature of the imagination, and, deciding that the gentleman had no real existence, she sat down on the arm-chair. On touching the bottom, she drew a long breath. From that day onward, she never again set eyes on any further phantoms, either of man or of beast. When smothering the crafty-looking old gentleman, she had smothered them all—fundamentally."

Félicie shook her head, saying :

"That does not apply to this case."

She meant to say that her own phantom was not a grotesque old man, on whom one could sit, but a jealous dead man who did not pay her visits without

some object. But she feared to speak of these things, and, letting her hands fall upon her knees, she held her peace.

Seeing her thus, dejected and crushed, he pointed out that these disorders of the vision were neither rare nor very serious, and that they soon vanished without leaving any traces.

"I myself," he said, "once had a vision."

"You?"

"Yes, I had a vision, some twenty years ago. It was in Egypt."

He noticed that she was looking at him inquiringly, so he began the story of his hallucination, having switched on all the electric lights, in order to disperse the phantoms of darkness.

"In the days when I was practising in Cairo, I was accustomed, in the February of each year, to go up the Nile as far as Luxor, and thence I proceeded, in company with some friends, to visit the tombs and temples in the desert. These trips across the sands are made on donkey-back. The last time I went to Luxor I hired a young donkey-boy, whose white donkey Rameses was stronger than the others. This donkey-boy, whose name was Selim, was also stronger, slenderer, and better looking than the other donkey-boys. He was fifteen years old. His shy, gentle eyes shone from behind a magnificent veil of long black lashes; his brown face

was a pure clear-cut oval. He tramped barefoot through the desert with a step which made one think of those dances of warriors of which the Bible speaks. His every movement was graceful; his young animal-like gaiety was charming. As he prodded Rameses' back with the point of his stick, he would chatter to me in a limited vocabulary in which English, French and Arabic were intermingled; he enjoyed telling me of the travellers whom he had escorted and who, he believed, were all princes or princesses; but if I asked him about his relations or his companions he remained silent, and assumed an air of indifference and boredom. When cadging for a promise of substantial baksheesh, the nasal twang of his voice assumed caressing inflexions. He thought out subtle stratagems and expended whole treasuries of prayers in order to obtain a cigarette. Noticing that I liked to see the donkey-boys treat their beasts with kindness, he used, in my presence, to kiss Rameses on the nostrils, and when we halted he would waltz with him. He often displayed real ingenuity in getting what he wanted. But he was far too short-sighted ever to show the slightest gratitude for what he had obtained. Greedy of piastres, he coveted still more eagerly such small glittering articles as one cannot keep covered—gold scarf-pins, rings, sleeve-links, or nickel cigar-lighters; and when he saw a gold

chain his face would light up with a gleam of pleasure.

"The following summer was the hardest time of my life. An epidemic of cholera had broken out in Lower Egypt. I was running about the town all day long in a scorching atmosphere. Cairo summers are overpowering to Europeans. We were going through the hottest weeks I had ever known. I heard one day that Selim, brought before the native court of Cairo, had been sentenced to death. He had murdered the daughter of some fellaheen, a little girl nine years old, in order to rob her of her ear-rings, and had thrown her into a cistern. The rings, stained with blood, had been found under a big stone in the Valley of the Kings. They were the crude jewels which the Nubian nomads hammer out of shillings or two-franc pieces. I was told that Selim would certainly be hanged, because the little girl's mother refused the tendered blood-money. Now, the Khedive does not enjoy the prerogative of mercy, and the murderer, according to Moslem law, can redeem his life only if the parents of the victim consent to receive from him a sum of money as compensation. I was too busy to give thought to the matter. I could readily imagine that Selim, cunning but thoughtless, caressing yet unfeeling, had played with the little girl, torn off her ear-rings, killed her, and hidden her

body. The affair soon passed out of my mind. The epidemic was spreading from Old Cairo to the European quarters. I was visiting from thirty to forty sick persons daily, practising venous injections in every case. I was suffering from liver trouble, anæmia was playing havoc with me, and I was dropping with fatigue. In order to husband my strength, I took a little rest at noon. I was accustomed, after luncheon, to lie down in the inner courtyard of my house, and there for an hour I bathed myself in the African shade, as dense and cool as water. One day, as I was lying there on a divan in my courtyard, just as I was lighting a cigarette, I saw Selim approaching. With his beautiful bronze arm he lifted the door-curtain, and came towards me in his blue robe. He did not speak, but smiled with his shy and innocent smile, and the deep red of his lips disclosed his dazzling teeth. His eyes, beneath the blue shadow of his eyelashes, shone with covetousness while gazing at my watch which lay on the table.

"I thought he had escaped. And this surprised me, not because captives are strictly watched in Oriental prisons, where men, women, horses and dogs are herded in imperfectly closed courtyards, and guarded by a soldier armed with a stick. But Moslems are never tempted to flee from their fate. Selim knelt down with an appealing grace, and

approached his lips to my hand, to kiss it according to ancient custom. I was not asleep, and I had proof of it. I also had proof that the apparition had been before me only for a short time. When Selim had vanished I noticed that my cigarette, which was alight, was not yet tipped with ash."

"Was he dead when you saw him?" asked Nanteuil.

"Not a bit of it," replied the doctor. "I heard a few days later that Selim, in his jail, wove little baskets, or played for hours at a time with a chaplet of glass balls, and that he would smilingly beg a piastre of European visitors, who were surprised by the caressing softness of his eyes. Moslem justice is slow. He was hanged six months later. No one, not even he himself, was greatly concerned about it. I was in Europe at the time."

"And since then he has never reappeared?"

"Never."

Nanteuil looked at him, disappointed.

"I thought he had come when he was dead. But since he was in prison you certainly could not have seen him in your house. You only thought you saw him."

The physician, understanding what was in Félicie's mind, quickly replied:

"My dear little Nanteuil, believe what I tell

you. The phantoms of the dead have no more reality than the phantoms of the living."

Without attending to what he was saying, she asked him if it was really because he suffered from his liver that he had a vision. He replied that he believed that the bad state of his digestive organs, general fatigue, and a tendency to congestion, had all predisposed him to behold an apparition.

"There was, I believe, he added, "a more immediate cause. Stretched out on my divan, my head was very low. I raised it to light a cigarette, and let it fall back immediately. This attitude is particularly favourable to hallucinations. It is sometimes enough to lie down with one's head thrown back to see and to hear imaginary shapes and sounds. That is why I advise you, my child, to sleep with a bolster and a fat pillow."

She began to laugh.

"As mamma does—majestically!"

Then, flitting off to another idea :

"Tell me, Socrates, how comes it that you saw this sordid individual rather than another? You had hired a donkey from him, and you were no longer thinking of him. And yet he came. Say what you like, it's queer."

"You ask me why it was he rather than another? It would be very hard for me to tell you. Our visions, bound up with our innermost

thoughts, often present their images to us; sometimes there is no connection between them, and they show us an unexpected figure."

He once more exhorted her not to allow herself to be frightened by phantoms.

"The dead do not return. When one of them appears to you, rest assured that what you see is a thing imagined by your brain."

"Can you," she inquired, "guarantee that there is nothing after death?"

"My child, there is nothing after death that could frighten you."

She rose, picked up her little bag and her part, and held out her hand to the doctor, saying:

"As for you, you don't believe in anything, do you, old Socrates?"

He detained her for a moment in the waiting-room, warned her to take good care of herself, to lead a quiet, restful life, and to take sufficient rest.

"Do you suppose that is easy in our profession? To-morrow I have a rehearsal in the green-room, and one on the stage, and I have to try on a gown, while to-night I am acting. For more than a year now I've been leading that sort of life."

CHAPTER X

NDER the great void reserved by the height of the roof for the upward flight of prayers the motley crowd of human beings was huddled together like a flock of sheep.

They were all there, at the foot of the catafalque surrounded by lights and covered with flowers : Durville, old Maury, Delage, Vicar, Destrée, Léon Clim, Valrosche, Aman, Regnard, Pradel, Romilly, and Marchegeay, the manager. They were all there, Madame Ravaud, Madame Doulce, Ellen Midi, Duvernet, Herschell, Falempin, Stella, Marie-Claire, Louise Dalle, Fagette, Nanteuil, kneeling, robed in black, like elegiac figures. Some of the women were reading their missals. Some were weeping. All of them brought to the coffin of their comrade at least the tribute of their heavy eyes and their faces pallid from the cold of the morning. Journalists, actors, playwrights, whole families of those artisans who gain their living by the theatre, and a crowd of curious onlookers filled the nave.

The choristers were uttering the mournful cries of the *Kyrie eleison;* the priest kissed the altar, turned towards the people and said :

"*Dominus vobiscum.*"

Romilly, taking in the crowd at a glance, remarked :

"Chevalier has a full house."

"Just look at that Louise Dalle," said Fagette. "To look as though she's in mourning, she has put on a black mackintosh !"

A little to the back of the church, with Pradel and Constantin Marc, Dr. Trublet was, in subdued tones, according to his habit, delivering his moral homilies.

"Observe," he said, "that they are lighting, on the altar and about the coffin, in the guise of wax candles, dimunitive night-lights mounted on billiard cues, and are thereby making an offering of lamp oil instead of virgin wax to the Lord. The pious men who dwell in the sanctuary have at all times been proved to defraud their God by these little deceptions. This observation is not my own ; it is, I believe, Renan's."

The celebrant, standing on the epistle side of the altar, was reciting in a low voice :

"*Nolumus autem vos ignorare fratres de dormientibus, ut non contristemini, sicut et cæteri qui spem non habent.*"

"Who is taking the part of Florentin?" inquired Durville of Romilly.

"Regnard: he'll be no worse in it than Chevalier."

Pradel plucked Trublet by the sleeve, and said:

"Dr. Socrates, I beg you to tell me whether, as a scientific man, as a physiologist, you see any serious objections to the immortality of the soul?"

He asked the question as a busy and practical man in need of personal information.

"You are doubtless aware, my dear friend," replied Trublet, "what Cyrano's bird said on this very subject. One day Cyrano de Bergerac heard two birds conversing in a tree. One of them said, 'The souls of birds are immortal.' 'There can be no doubt of it,' replied the other. 'But it is inconceivable that beings who possess neither bill nor feathers, who have no wings and walk on two legs, should believe that they, like the birds, have an immortal soul.'"

"All the same," said Pradel, "when I hear the organ, I am chock-full of religious ideas."

"*Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine.*"

The celebrated author of *La Nuit du 23 octobre 1812* appeared in the church, and no sooner had he done so than he was everywhere at one and the same moment—in the nave, under the porch, and in

the choir. Like the *Diable boiteux*, he must, bestriding his crutch, have soared above the heads of the congregation, to pass as he did in the twinkling of an eye from Morlot, the deputy, who, being a freethinker, had remained in the parvis, to Marie-Claire kneeling at the foot of the catafalque.

At one and at the same moment he whispered into the ears of all a few nimble phrases :

"Pradel, can you imagine this fellow going and chucking his part, an excellent part, and running off to kill himself? A pumpkin-headed fool! Blows out his brains just two days before the first night. Compels us to replace him and sets us back a week. What an imbecile! A rotten bad egg. But we must do him justice; he could jump, and jump well, the animal. Well, my dear Romilly, we rehearse the new man to-day at two o'clock. See to it that Regnard has the script of his part, and that he knows how to climb on to the roof. Let us hope he won't kick the bucket on our hands like Chevalier. What if he, too, were to commit suicide! You needn't laugh. There's an evil spell on certain parts. Thus, in my *Marino Falieri*, the gondolier Sandro breaks his arm at the dress rehearsal. I am given another Sandro. He sprains his ankle on the first night. I am given a third; he contracts typhoid fever. My little

Nanteuil, I'll entrust you with a magificent rôle to create when you get to the Français. But I have sworn by the great gods that I'll never again have a single play performed in this theatre."

And immediately, under the little door which shuts off the choir on the right hand side of the altar, showing his friends Racine's epitaph, which is let into the wall, like a Parisian thoroughly conversant with the antiquities of his city, he recalled the history of this stone; he told them how the poet had been buried in accordance with his desire at Port-Royal-des-Champs, at the foot of Monsieur Hamon's grave, and that, after the destruction of the abbey and the violation of the tombs, the body of Messire Jean Racine, the King's secretary, Groom of the Chamber, had been transferred, all unhonoured, to Saint-Êtienne-du-Mont. And he told how the tombstone, bearing the inscription composed for Boileau, beneath the knight's crest and the shield with its swan argent, and done into Latin by Monsieur Dodart, had served as a flagstone in the choir of the little church of Magny-Lessart, where it had been discovered in 1808.

"There it is," he added. "It was broken in six pieces and the name of Racine was effaced by the shoes of the peasants. The fragments were pieced together and the missing letters carved anew."

On this subject he expatiated with his customary vivacity and diffusiveness, drawing from his prodigious memory a multitude of curious facts and amusing anecdotes, breathing life into history and endowing archæology with a living interest. His admiration and his wrath burst forth in swift and violent alternation in the solemnity of the church, and amid the pomp of the ceremony.

"I would give something to know, for instance, who were the stupid bunglers who set this stone in the wall. *Hic jacet nobilis vir Johannes Racine.* It is not true! They make honest Boileau's epitaph lie. The body of Racine is not in this spot. It was laid to rest in the third chapel on the left, as you enter. What idiots!" Then, suddenly calm, he pointed to Pascal's tombstone.

"That came here from the museum of the Petits-Augustins. No praise can be too great for Lenoir, who, in the days of the Revolution, collected and preserved."

Thereupon, he improvised a second lecture on lapidary archæology, even more brilliant than the first, transformed the history of Pascal's life into a terrible yet amusing drama, and vanished. In all, he had remained in the church for the space of ten minutes.

Over those heads full of worldly cares and profane desires the *Dies iræ* rumbled like a storm:

"*Mors stupebit et natura,*
Quum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura."

"Tell me, Dutil, how could that little Nanteuil, who is pretty and intelligent, get herself mixed up with a dirty mummer like Chevalier?"

"Your ignorance of the feminine heart surprises me."

"Herschell was prettier when she was a brunette."

"*Qui Mariam absolvisti*
Et latronem exaudisti
Mihi quoque spem dedisti."

"I must be off to lunch."

"Do you know anyone who knows the Minister?"

"Durville is a has-been. He blows like a grampus."

"Put me in a little paragraph about Marie Falempin. I can tell you she was simply delicious in *Les Trois Magots.*"

"*Inter oves locum presta*
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra."

"So then, it is for Nanteuil's sake that he blew out his brains? A little ninny who isn't worth spanking!"

The celebrant poured the wine and the water into the chalice, saying:

"*Deus qui humanæ substantiæ dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti. . . .*"

"Is it really true, doctor, that he killed himself because Nanteuil wouldn't have any more to do with him?"

"He killed himself," replied Trublet, "because she loved another. The obsession of genetic images frequently determines mania and melancholia."

"You don't understand second-rate actors, Dr. Socrates," said Pradel. "He killed himself to cause a sensation, and for no other reason."

"It's not only second-rate actors," said Constantin Marc, "who suffer from an uncontrollable desire to attract attention to themselves at whatever cost. Last year, in the place where I live, Saint-Bartholomé, while a threshing-machine was at work, a thirteen-year-old boy shoved his arm into the gear; it was crushed up to the shoulder. The surgeon who amputated it asked him, as he was dressing the stump, why he mutilated himself like that. The boy confessed that it was to draw attention to himself."

Meanwhile, Nanteuil, with dry eyes and pursed lips, had fixed her eyes upon the black cloth with which the catafalque was covered, and was impatiently waiting until enough holy water, candles and Latin prayers should be bestowed upon the dead man for him to depart in peace. She had

seen him again the night before, and she thought he had returned because the priests had not yet bidden him to rest in peace. Then, reflecting that one day she, too, would die, and would, like him, be laid in a coffin, beneath a black pall, she shuddered with horror and closed her eyes. The idea of life was so strong within her that she pictured death as a hideous life. Afraid of death, she prayed for a long life. Kneeling, with bowed head, the voluptuous ashen cloud of her buoyant hair falling over her forehead, she, a profane penitent, was reading in her prayer-book words which reassured her, although she did not understand them :

"Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful dead from the pains of hell and from the depths of the bottomless pit. Deliver them from the lion's jaws. Let them not be plunged into hell, and let them not fall into the outer darkness, but suffer that St. Michael, the Prince of Angels, lead them to the holy light promised by Thee to Abraham and to his posterity."

At the Elevation of the Host the congregation, permeated by a vague impression that the mystery was becoming more sacred, ceased its private conversations, and assumed a certain appearance of reverent devotion. And as the organ fell silent all heads were bowed at the tinkling of a little

bell which was shaken by a child. Then, after the last Gospel, when, the service being over, the priest, attended by his acolytes, approached the catafalque to the chanting of the *Libera*, a sense of relief was experienced by the crowd, and they began to jostle one another a little in order to file past the coffin. The women, whose piety, grief and contrition were contingent upon their immobility and their kneeling posture, were at once recalled to their customary frame of mind by the movement and the encounters of the procession. They exchanged amongst themselves and with the men remarks relating to their profession.

"Do you know," said Ellen Midi to Falempin, "that Nanteuil is going to join the Comédie-Française?"

"It's not possible!"

"The contract is signed."

"How did she manage it?"

"Not by her acting, you may be sure," replied Ellen, who proceeded to relate a highly scandalous story.

"Take care," said Falempin, "she is just behind you."

"Yes, I see her! She's got a cheek of her own to show herself here, don't you think?"

Marie-Claire whispered an extraordinary piece of news into Durville's ear:

"They say he committed suicide. Well, there's not a word of truth in it. He didn't commit suicide at all. And the proof of it is that he is being buried with the rites of the Church."

"What then?" inquired Durville.

"Monsieur de Ligny surprised him with Nanteuil and killed him."

"Come, come!"

"I can assure you that I am accurately informed."

The conversations were becoming animated and familiar.

"So you are here, you wicked old sinner!"

"The box-office receipts are falling off already."

"Stella has succeeded in getting herself proposed by seventeen Deputies, nine of whom are members of the Budget Commission."

"Yet I told Herschell: 'That little Bocquet fellow isn't the man for you. What you need is a man of standing.'"

When the bier, borne by the undertaker's men, passed through the west door, the delicious rays of a winter sun fell on the faces of the women and the roses lying on the coffin. Grouped on either side of the parvis, a few young men from the great colleges sought the faces of celebrities; the little factory girls from the neighbouring workshops, standing in couples with arms round each other's

waists, contemplated the actresses' dresses. And standing against the porch on their aching feet, a couple of tramps, accustomed to living under the open sky, whether mild or sullen, slowly shifted their dejected gaze, while a college lad gazed with rapture at the fiery tresses which coiled like flames on the nape of Fagette's neck.

She had stopped on the topmost step in front of the doors, and was chatting with Constantin Marc and a few journalists :

". . . Monsieur de Ligny ? He danced attendance upon me long before he knew Nanteuil. He used to gaze upon me by the hour, with eager eyes, without daring to speak a word to me. I received him willingly enough, for his behaviour was perfect. It is only fair to say that his manners are excellent. He was as reserved as a man could be. At last, one day, he declared that he was madly in love with me. I told him that as he was speaking to me seriously I would do the same ; that I was truly sorry to see him in such a state ; that every time such a thing happened I was greatly upset by it ; that I was a woman of standing, I had settled my life, and could do nothing for him. He was desperate. He informed me that he was leaving for Constantinople, that he would never return. He couldn't make up his mind either to remain or to go away. He fell ill. Nanteuil, who

thought I loved him and wanted to keep him, did all in her power to get him away from me. She flung herself at his head in the craziest fashion. I found her sometimes a trifle ridiculous, but, as you may imagine, I did not place any obstacle in her path. For his part, Monsieur de Ligny, with the object of inspiring me with regret, with vexation, or what not, perhaps in the hope of making me jealous, responded very visibly to Nanteuil's advances. And that is how they came to be together. I was delighted. Nanteuil and I are the best of friends."

Madame Doulce, hedged in on either side by the onlookers, came slowly down the steps, indulging herself in the illusion that the crowd was whispering, "That's Doulce!"

She seized Nanteuil as she was passing, pressed her to her bosom, and with a beautiful gesture of Christian charity enveloped her in her mantle, saying through her sobs:

"Try to pray, my child, and accept this medal. It has been blessed by the Pope. A Dominican Father gave it to me."

Madame Nanteuil, who was a little out of breath, but was growing young again since she had renewed her experience of love, was the last to come out. Durville pressed her hand.

"Poor Chevalier!" he murmured.

"His was not a bad character," answered Madame Nanteuil, "but he showed a lack of tact. A man of the world does not commit suicide in such a manner. Poor boy, he had no breeding."

The hearse began its journey in the colossal shadow of the Panthéon, and proceeded down the Rue Soufflet, which is lined on both sides with booksellers' shops. Chevalier's fellow-players, the employés of the theatre, the director, Dr. Socrates, Constantin Marc, a few journalists and a few inquisitive onlookers followed. The clergy and the actresses took their seats in the mourning coaches. Nanteuil, disregarding Madame Doulce's advice, followed with Fagette, in a hired coupé.

The weather was fine. Behind the hearse the mourners were conversing in familiar fashion.

"The cemetery is the devil of a way!"

"Montparnasse? Half an hour at the outside."

"Do you know Nanteuil is engaged at the Comédie-Française?"

"Do we rehearse to-day?" Constantin Marc inquired of Romilly.

"To be sure we do, at three o'clock, in the green-room. We shall rehearse till five. I am playing to-night; I am playing to-morrow; on Sunday I play both afternoon and evening. Work is never over for us actors; one is always beginning over again, always putting one's shoulder to the wheel."

Adolphe Meunier, the poet, laying his hand on his shoulder said :

"Everything going well, Romilly ?"

"How are you getting on yourself, Meunier ? Always rolling the rock of Sisyphus. That would be nothing, but success does not depend on us alone. If the play is bad and falls flat, all that we have put into it, our work, our talent, a bit of our own life, collapses with it. And the number of 'frosts' I've seen ! How often the play has fallen under me like an old hack, and has chucked me into the gutter ! Ah, if one were punished only for one's own sins ! "

"My dear Romilly," replied Meunier sharply, "do you imagine that the fate of dramatic authors like myself does not depend as much upon the actors as upon ourselves ? Do you think it never happens that actors, by their carelessness or clumsiness, ruin a work which was meant to reach the heights ? And do not we also, like Cæsar's legionary, become seized with dismay and anguish at the thought that our fate is not assured by our own valour, but that it depends on those who fight beside us ? "

"Such is life," observed Constantin Marc. "In every undertaking, everywhere and always, we pay for the faults of others."

"That is only too true," resumed Meunier, who had just seen his lyric drama, *Pandolphe et Clarimonde*,

come hopelessly to grief. "But the iniquity of it disgusts us."

"It should not disgust us in the least," replied Constantin Marc. "There is a sacred law which governs the world, which we are forced to obey, which we are proud to worship. It is injustice, holy injustice, august injustice. It is everywhere blessed under the name of happiness, fortune, genius and grace. It is a weakness not to acknowledge it and to venerate it under its true name."

"That's rather weird, what you have just said!" remarked the gentle Meunier.

"Think it over," resumed Constantin Marc. "You, too, belong yourself to the party of injustice, for you are striving for distinction, and you very reasonably want to throttle your competitors, a natural, unjust and legitimate desire. Do you know of anything more stupid or more odious than the sort of people we have seen demanding justice? Public opinion, which is not, however, remarkable for its intelligence, and common sense, which nevertheless is not a superior sense, have felt that they constituted the precise contrary of nature, society and life."

"Quite so," said Meunier, "but justice——"

"Justice is nothing but the dream of a few simpletons. Injustice is the thought of God Himself. The doctrine of original sin would alone

suffice to make me a Christian, while the doctrine of grace embodies all truths divine and human."

"Then are you a believer?" asked Romilly respectfully.

"No, but I should like to be. I regard faith as the most precious possession which a man can enjoy in this world. At Saint-Bartholomé, I go to Mass every Sunday and feast day, and I have never once listened to the exposition of the Gospel by the *curé* without saying to myself: 'I would give all I possess, my house, my acres, my woods, to be as stupid as that animal there.'"

Michel, the young painter with the mystic's beard, was saying to Roger, the scene painter:

"That poor Chevalier was a man with ideas. But they were not all good ones. One evening, he walked into the *brasserie* radiant and transfigured, sat himself beside us, and twirling his old felt hat between his long red fingers, he cried: 'I have discovered the true manner of acting tragedy. Hitherto no one has realized how to act tragedy, no one, you understand!' And he told us what his discovery was. 'I've just come from the Chamber. They made me climb up to the amphitheatre. I could see the Deputies swarming like black insects at the bottom of a pit. Suddenly a stumpy little man mounted the tribune. He looked

as if he were carrying a sack of coals on his back. He threw out his arms and clenched his fists. By Jove, he was comical! He had a Southern accent, and his delivery was full of defects. He spoke of the workers, of the proletariat, of social justice. It was magnificent; his voice, his gestures gripped one's very bowels; the applause nearly brought the house down. I said to myself: "What he is doing, I'll do on the stage, and I'll do it better. I, a comic actor, will play tragedy. Great tragedy parts, if they are to produce their true effect, ought to be played by a comedian, but he must have a soul."' The poor fellow actually thought that he had imagined a new form of art. 'You'll see,' he said."

At the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, a journalist came up to Meunier, and asked him:

"Is it true that Robert de Ligny was at one time madly in love with Fagette?"

"If he's in love with her, he hasn't been so long. Only a fortnight ago he asked me, in the theatre, 'Who is that little fair-haired woman?' and he pointed to Fagette."

"I cannot understand," said the chronicler of an evening paper to a chronicler of a morning paper, "what can be the origin of our mania for calumniating humanity. I am amazed, on the other hand, by the number of decent people I come across.

It is enough to make one incline to the belief that men are ashamed of the good they do, and that they conceal themselves when performing acts of devotion and generosity. Don't you think that is so?'

"As far as I am concerned," replied the chronicler of the morning paper, "every time I have opened a door by mistake—I mean this both literally and metaphorically—I have always come across some unsuspected baseness. Were society suddenly turned inside out like a glove, so that one could see the inside, we should all faint away with horror and disgust."

"Some time ago," said Roger to the painter Michel, "I used to know Chevalier's uncle on the Butte de Montmartre. He was a photographer who dressed like an astrologer. A crazy old fellow, always sending one customer the portrait of another. The customers used to complain. But not all of them. There were even some who thought the portraits were a good likeness."

"What has become of him?"

"He went bankrupt and hanged himself."

In the Boulevard Saint-Michel Pradel, who was walking beside Trublet, was still profiting by the opportunity of obtaining information as to the immortality of the soul and the fate of man after death. He obtained nothing that seemed to him sufficiently positive and repeated:

"I should like to know."

To which Dr. Socrates replied:

"Men were not made to know; men were not made to understand. They do not possess the necessary faculties. A man's brain is larger and richer in convolutions than that of a gorilla, but there is no essential difference between the two. Our highest thoughts and our most comprehensive systems will never be anything more than the magnificent extension of the ideas contained in the head of a monkey. We know more about the world than the dog does, and this flatters and entertains us; but it is very little in itself, and our illusions increase with our knowledge."

But Pradel was not listening. He was mentally rehearsing the speech which he had to deliver at Chevalier's grave.

When the funeral procession turned towards the shabby grass-plots which overflow the Avenue de l'Observatoire, the tram-cars, out of respect for the dead, made way for it.

Trublet remarked upon this.

"Men," he said, "respect death, since they rightly believe that, if it is respectable to die, every one is assured of being respectable in that, at least."

The actors were excitedly discussing Chevalier's death. Durville, mysteriously, and in a deep voice, disclosed the tragedy:

"It is not a case of suicide. It is a crime of passion. Monsieur de Ligny surprised Chevalier with Nanteuil. He fired seven revolver shots at him. Two bullets struck our unfortunate comrade in the head and the chest, four went wide, and the fifth grazed Nanteuil below the left breast."

"Is Nanteuil wounded?"

"Only slightly."

"Will Monsieur de Ligny be arrested?"

"The affair is to be hushed up, and rightly so. I have, however, the best authority for what I say."

In the carriages, too, the actresses were engaged in spreading various reports. Some felt sure it was a case of murder; others, one of suicide.

"He shot himself in the chest with a revolver," asserted Falempin. "But he only succeeded in wounding himself. The doctor said that if he had been attended to in time he might have been saved. But they left him lying on the floor, bathed in blood."

And Madame Doulce said to Ellen Midi:

"It has often been my fate to stand beside a deathbed. I always go down on my knees and pray. I at once feel myself invaded by a heavenly serenity."

"You are indeed fortunate!" replied Ellen Midi.

At the end of the Rue Campagne-Première, on the wide grey boulevards, they became conscious

of the length of the road which they had covered, and the melancholy nature of the journey. They felt that while following the coffin they had crossed the confines of life, and were already in the country of the dead. On their right stretched the yards of the marble-workers, the florists' shops which supplied wreaths for funerals, displays of potted flowers, and the economical furniture of tombs, zinc flower-stands, wreaths of immortelles in cement, and guardian angels in plaster. On their left, they could see behind the low wall of the cemetery the white crosses rising among the bare tops of the lime-trees, and everywhere, in the wan dust, they breathed death, commonplace, uniform death, under the administration of City and State, and poorly embellished by the pious hands of relations.

They passed between two massive pillars of stone surmounted by winged hour-glasses. The hearse advanced slowly on the gravel which creaked in the silence. It seemed, amid the homes of the dead, to be twice as tall as before. The mourners read the famous names on some of the tombs, or gazed at the statue of a young girl, seated, book in hand. Old Maury deciphered, in the inscriptions, the age of the deceased. Short lives, and even more lives of average duration, distressed him as being of ill omen. But, when he encountered those of the dead who were notable for the length of their

years, he joyfully drew from them the hope and probability of a long lease of life.

The hearse stopped in the middle of a side alley. The clergy and the women stepped out of the coaches. Delage received in his arms, from the top of the carriage steps, the worthy Madame Ravaud, who was getting a little ponderous, and of a sudden, half in jest, half in earnest, he made certain proposals to her. She was no longer young, having been on the stage for half a century. Delage, with his twenty-five years, looked upon her as prodigiously old. Yet, as he whispered into her ear, he felt excited, infatuated, he became sincere, he really desired her, out of perverse curiosity, because he wanted to do something extraordinary, and was certain that he would be able to do it, perhaps because of his professional instinct as a handsome youth, and, lastly, because, in the first place having asked for what he did not want, he began to want what he had asked for. Madame Ravaud, indignant but flattered, made good her escape.

The coffin was carried along a narrow path bordered with dwarf cypresses, amid a murmuring of prayers :

"*In paradisum deducant te Angeli, in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem, Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat et cum Lazaro, quondam paupere, æternam habeas requiem.*"

Soon there was no longer any visible path. It was necessary, in following the quickly vanishing coffin, the priests and the choristers, to scatter, striding over the recumbent tombstones, and slipping between the broken columns and upright slabs. They lost the coffin and found it again. Nanteuil evinced a certain eagerness in her pursuit of it, anxious and abrupt, her prayer-book in her hand, freeing her skirt as it caught on the railings, and brushing past the withered wreaths which left the heads of immortelles adhering to her gown. Finally, the first to reach the graveside smelt the acrid odour of the freshly turned soil, and from the heights of the neighbouring flagstones saw the grave into which the coffin was being lowered.

The actors had contributed liberally to the expenses of the funeral ; they had clubbed together to buy for their comrade as much earth as he needed, two metres granted for five years. Romilly, on behalf of the actors of the Odéon, had paid the cemetery board 300 francs—to be exact, 301 fr. 80 centimes. He had even made plans for a monument, a broken stele with comedy masks suspended upon it. But no decision had been come to on this point.

The celebrant blessed the open grave. And the priest and the boy choristers murmured the responses :

" *Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine.*"

"*Et lux perpetua luceat ei.*"

"*Requiescat in pace.*"

"*Amen.*"

"*Anima ejus et animæ omnium fidelium defunctorum, per misericordiam Dei, requiescant in pace.*"

"*Amen.*"

"*De profundis . . . .*"

Each one of those present came forward to sprinkle holy water on the coffin. Nanteuil stood watching it all, the prayers, the spadefuls of earth, the sprinkling; then, kneeling apart on the corner of a tomb, she fervently recited: "Our Father who art in heaven . . . "

Pradel spoke at the graveside. He refrained from making a speech. But the Théâtre de l'Odéon could not allow a young artist beloved of all to depart without a word of farewell.

"I shall speak therefore, in the name of the great and true-hearted dramatic family, the words that are in every bosom."

Grouped about the speaker in studied attitudes, the actors listened with profound knowledge. They listened actively, with their ears, lips, eyes, arms, and legs. Each listened in his own manner, with nobility, simplicity, grief or rebelliousness, according to the parts which the actor was accustomed to play.

No, the director of the theatre would not suffer the valiant actor, who, in the course of his only too

brief career, had shown more than promise, to depart without a word of farewell.

"Chevalier, impetuous, uneven, restless, imparted to his creations an individual character, a distinctive physiognomy. We saw him a very few days ago—a few hours ago, I might say—bring an episodical character into powerful relief. The author of the play was struck by the performance. Chevalier was on the verge of success. The sacred flame was his. There are those who have asked, what was the cause of so cruel an end? Let us not seek for that cause. Chevalier died of his art; he died of dramatic fever. He died consumed by the flame which is slowly consuming all of us. Alas, the stage, of which the public sees only the smiles, and the tears, as sweet as the smiles, is a jealous master which demands of its servants an absolute devotion and the most painful sacrifices, and, at times, claims its victims. In the name of all your comrades, farewell, Chevalier, farewell!"

The handkerchiefs were at work, wiping away the mourners' tears. The actors were weeping with all sincerity; they were weeping for themselves.

After they had slipped away, Dr. Trublet, left alone in the cemetery with Constantin Marc, took in the multitude of graves with a glance.

"Do you remember," he said, "one of Auguste Comte's reflections: 'Humanity is composed of the

dead and the living. The dead are by far the more numerous.' Assuredly, the dead are by far the more numerous. By the multitudinous numbers and the magnitude of their work, they are more powerful. It's they who rule; we obey them. Our masters lie beneath these stones. Here is the lawgiver who made the law to which I submit to-day; the architect who built my house; the poet who created the illusions which still disturb us; the orator who swayed us before our birth. Here are all the artisans of our knowledge, true or false, of our wisdom and of our follies. There they lie, the inexorable leaders, whom we dare not disobey. In them dwells strength, continuity, and duration. What does a generation of living folk amount to, in comparison with the numberless generations of the dead? What is our will of a day before the will of a thousand centuries? Can we rebel against them? Why, we have not even time to disobey them!"

"At last you are coming to the point, Dr. Socrates!" said Constantin Marc. "You renounce progress, the new justice, the peace of the world, freedom of thought; you submit to tradition. You consent to the ancient error, the good old-fashioned ignorance, the venerable iniquity of our forbears. You withdraw into the French tradition, you submit to ancient custom, to the authority of our ancestors."

"Whence do you obtain custom and tradition?" asked Trublet. "Whence do you receive authority? There are irreconcilable traditions, diverse customs, and opposed authorities. The dead do not impose any one will upon us. They subject us to contradictory wills. The opinions of the past which weigh upon us are uncertain and confused. In crushing us they destroy one another. All these dead have lived, like ourselves, in the midst of disorder and contradiction. Each in his time, in his own fashion, in hatred or in love, has dreamed the dream of life. Let us in our turn dream this dream with kindness and joy, if it be possible, and let us go to lunch. I am taking you to a little tavern in the Rue Vavin, kept by Clémence, who cooks only one dish, but a marvellous one at that: the Castelnaudary *cassoulet*, not to be confused with the *cassoulet* prepared in the Carcassonne fashion, which is merely a leg of mutton with haricot beans. The *cassoulet* of Castelnaudary comprises pickled goose legs, haricot beans that have been previously bleached, bacon, and a small sausage. To be good, it must be cooked for a long time over a slow fire. Clémence's *cassoulet* has been cooking for twenty years. From time to time she puts in the saucepan, now a little bit of goose or bacon, now a sausage or some haricots, but it is always the same *cassoulet*. The stock remains, and this ancient and

precious stock gives it the flavour which, in the pictures of the old Venetian masters, one finds in the amber-coloured flesh of the women. Come, I want you to taste Clémence's *cassoulet.*"

CHAPTER XI

AVING said her prayer, Nanteuil, without waiting to hear Pradel's speech, jumped into a carriage in order to join Robert de Ligny, who was waiting for her in front of the Montparnasse railway station. Amid the throng of passers-by they shook hands, gazing at one another without a word. More than ever did they feel that they were bound together. Robert loved her.

He loved her without knowing it. She was for him, or so he believed, merely one delight in the infinite series of possible delights. But delight had assumed for him the form of Félicie, and, had he reflected more deeply upon the innumerable women whom he promised himself in the vast remainder of his newly begun life, he would have recognized that now they were all Félicies. He might at least have realized that, without having any intention of being faithful to her, he did not dream of being unfaithful, and that since she had given herself to him he had not desired any other woman. But he did not realize it.

On this occasion, however, standing in the bustling commonplace square, on seeing her no longer in the voluptuous shadow of night, nor under the caressing glimmer of the alcove which gave her naked form the delicious vagueness of a Milky Way, but in a harsh, diffused daylight, by the circumstantial illumination of a sunlight devoid of splendour and without shadows, which revealed beneath her veil her eyelids that were seared with tears, her pearly cheeks and roughened lips, he realized that he felt for this woman's flesh a profound and mysterious inclination.

He did not question her. They exchanged only tender trivial phrases. And, as she was very hungry, he took her to lunch at a well-known *cabaret*, whose name shone in letters of gold on one of the old houses in the square. They had their meal served in the winter-garden, whose rockery, fountain, and solitary tree were multiplied by mirrors framed in a green trellis. When seated at the table, consulting the bill of fare, they conversed with less restraint than heretofore. He told her that the emotions and worries of the past three days had unstrung his nerves, but he no longer thought about it, and it would be absurd to worry about the matter any further. She spoke to him of her health, complaining that she could not sleep, save for a restless slumber full of dreams. But she did not tell him what she saw

in those dreams, and she avoided speaking of the dead man. He asked her if she had not spent a tiring morning, and why she had gone to the cemetery, a useless proceeding.

Incapable of explaining to him the depths of her soul, submissive to rites and propitiatory ceremonies and incantations, she shook her head as if to say: "Had to."

While those lunching at the adjoining tables were finishing their meal, they talked for a long time, both in subdued tones, while waiting to be served.

Robert had promised himself, had sworn indeed never to reproach Félicie for having had Chevalier for her lover, or even to ask her a single question in this connection. And yet, moved by some obscure resentment, by an ebullition of ill-temper or natural curiosity, and also because he loved her too deeply to control himself, he said to her, with bitterness in his voice:

"You were on intimate terms with him, formerly."

She was silent, and did not deny the fact. Not that she felt that it was henceforth useless to lie. On the contrary, she was in the habit of denying the obvious truth, and she had, of course, too much knowledge of men to be ignorant of the fact that, when in love, there is no lie, however clumsy, which

they cannot believe if they wish to do so. But on this occasion, contrary to her nature and habit, she refrained from lying. She was afraid of offending the dead. She imagined that in denying him she would be doing him a wrong, depriving him of his share, angering him. She held her peace, fearing to see him come and rest his elbows on the table, with his fixed smile and the hole in his head, and to hear him say in his plaintive voice : "Félicie, you surely cannot have forgotten our little room in the Rue des Martyrs ?"

What he had become, for her, since his death, she could not have said, so alien was it to her beliefs, so contrary to her reason, and so antiquated, ridiculous and obsolete did the words which would have expressed her feeling seem to her. But from some remote inherited instinct, or more likely from certain tales which she had heard in her childhood, she derived a confused idea that he was of the number of those dead who in the days of old were wont to torment the living, and were exorcised by the priests ; for upon thinking of him she instinctively began to make the sign of the cross, and she checked herself only that she might not seem ridiculous.

Ligny, seeing her melancholy and distracted, blamed himself for his harsh and useless words, while at the very moment of reproaching himself

for them he followed them by others equally harsh and equally useless :

"And yet you told me it was not true!"

She replied, fervently :

"Because, don't you see, I wanted it not to be true."

She added :

"Oh, my darling, since I've been yours, I swear to you that I've not belonged to anyone else. I don't claim any merit for this ; I should have found it impossible."

Like the young of animals, she had need of gaiety. The wine, which shone in her glass like liquid amber, was a joy to her eyes, and she moistened her tongue with it with luxurious pleasure. She took an interest in the dishes set before her, and especially in the *pommes de terre soufflées*, like golden blisters. Next she watched the people lunching at the tables in the dining-room, attributing to them, according to their appearance, ridiculous opinions or grotesque passions. She noticed the ill-natured glances which the women directed toward her, and the efforts of the men to appear handsome and important. And she gave utterance to a general reflection :

"Robert, have you noticed that people are never natural? They do not say a thing because they think it. They say it because they think it is what

they ought to say. This habit makes them very wearisome. And it is extremely rare to find anyone who is natural. You, you are natural."

"Well, I don't think I'm guilty of posing."

"You pose like the rest. But you pose in your own character. I can see perfectly well when you are trying to surprise and impress me."

She spoke to him of himself, and, led back by an involuntary train of thought to the tragedy enacted at Neuilly, she inquired :

"Did your mother say anything to you ?"

"No."

"Yet she must have known."

"It is probable."

"Are you on good terms with her ?"

"Why, yes !"

"They say she is still very beautiful, your mother, is it so ?"

He did not answer her and sought to change the conversation. He did not like Félicie to speak to him of his mother, or to turn her attention to his family. Monsieur and Madame de Ligny enjoyed the highest consideration in Parisian society. Monsieur de Ligny, a diplomatist by birth and by profession, was in himself a person worthy of the greatest consideration. He was so even before his birth, by virtue of the diplomatic services which his ancestors had rendered to France. His great-

grandfather had signed the surrender of Pondicherry to England. Madame de Ligny lived with her husband on the most correct terms. But, although she had no money of her own, she lived in great style, and her gowns were one of the greatest glories of France. She received intimate visits from an ex-Ambassador. His age, his position, his opinions, his titles, and his great fortune made the connection respectable. Madame de Ligny kept the ladies of the Republic at arm's length, and, when the spirit moved her, gave them lessons in decorum. She had nothing to fear from the opinion of the fashionable world. Robert knew that she was looked upon with respect by people in society. But he was continually dreading that, in speaking of her, Félicie might fail to do so with all the needful reserve. He feared lest, not being in society, she might say that which had better have been left unsaid. He was wrong; Félicie knew nothing of the private life of Madame de Ligny; moreover, had she known of it, she would not have blamed her. The lady inspired her with a naïve curiosity and an admiration mingled with fear. Since her lover was unwilling to speak to her of his mother, she attributed his reserve to a certain aristocratic arrogance, even to a lack of consideration for her, at which the pride of the freewoman and the plebeian was up in arms. She was wont to say to him tartly:

"I'm perfectly free to speak of your mother." The first time she had added: "Mine is just as good as yours." But she had realized that the remark was vulgar, and she had not repeated it.

The dining-room was now empty. She looked at her watch, and saw that it was three o'clock.

"I must be off," she said. "*La Grille* is being rehearsed this afternoon. Constantin Marc ought to be at the theatre already. There's another queer fellow for you! He boasts that when he's in the Vivarais he ruins all the women. And yet he is so shy that he daren't even talk to Fagette and Falempin. I frighten him. It amuses me."

She was so tired that she had not the courage to rise.

"Isn't it queer? They are saying everywhere that I'm engaged for the Français. It's not true. There's not even a question of it. Of course, I can't remain indefinitely where I am. In the long run one would get besotted there. But there is no hurry. I have a great part to create in *La Grille*. We shall see after that. What I want is to play comedy. I don't want to join the Français and then to do nothing."

Suddenly, gazing in front of her with eyes full of terror, she flung herself backwards, turned pale, and uttered a shrill scream. Then her eyelids fluttered, and she murmured that she could not breathe.

Robert loosened her jacket, and moistened her temples with a little water.

She spoke :

"A priest! I saw a priest. He was in his surplice. His lips were moving, but no sound came from them. He looked at me."

He tried to comfort her :

"Come now, my darling, how can you suppose that a priest, a priest in his surplice, would show himself in a restaurant ?"

She listened obediently, and allowed herself to be persuaded.

"You are right, you are right, I know it well enough."

In that little head of hers illusions were soon dispelled. She was born two hundred and thirty years after the death of Descartes, of whom she had never heard ; yet, as Dr. Socrates would have said, he had taught her the use of reason.

Robert met her at six o'clock after the rehearsal, under the arcades of the Odéon, and drove away with her in a cab.

"Where are we going ?" she inquired.

He hesitated a little.

"You would not care to go back to our house out there ?"

She cried out at the suggestion.

"Oh no ! I couldn't ! Oh, heavens, never !"

He replied that he had thought as much; that he would try to find something else: a little ground-floor flat in Paris; that in the meantime, just for to-day, they would content themselves with a chance abode.

She gazed at him with fixed, heavy eyes, drew him violently towards her, scorching his neck and ear with the breath of her desire. Then her arms fell away from him, and she sank back beside him, dejected and relaxed.

When the cab stopped, she said:

"You will not be vexed with me, will you, my own Robert, at what I am going to say? Not to-day—to-morrow."

She had considered it necessary to make this sacrifice to the jealous dead.

CHAPTER XII

N the following day, he took her to a furnished room, commonplace but cheerful, which he had selected on the first floor of a house facing the square, near the Bibliothèque Nationale. In the centre of the square stood the basin of a fountain supported by lusty nymphs. The paths, bordered with laurel and spindlewood, were deserted, and from this little-frequented spot one heard the vast and reassuring hum of the city. The rehearsal had finished very late. When they entered the room the night, already slower to arrive in this season of melting snow, was beginning to cast its gloom over the hangings. The large mirrors of the wardrobe and overmantel were filling with vague lights and shadows. She took off her fur coat, went to look out of the window between the curtains and said :

" Robert, the steps are wet."

He answered that there was no flight of steps, only the pavement and the road, and then another pavement and the railings of the square.

"You are a Parisian, you know this square well. In the centre, among the trees, there is a monumental fountain, with enormous women whose breasts are not as pretty as yours."

In his impatience he helped her to undo her cloth frock, but he could not find the hooks, and scratched himself with the pins.

"I am clumsy," he said.

She retorted laughingly :

"You are certainly not so clever as Madame Michon ! It's not so much clumsiness, but you are afraid of getting pricked. Men are a cowardly race. As for women, they have to accustom themselves to suffer. It's true : to be a woman is to be nearly always ailing."

He did not notice that she was pale, with dark rings round her eyes. He desired her so ardently ; he no longer saw her.

"They are very sensitive to pain," he said, "but they are also very sensitive to pleasure. Do you know Claude Bernard ?"

"No."

"He was a great scientist. He said that he didn't hesitate to recognize woman's supremacy in the domain of physical and moral sensibility."

Nantueil, unhooking her stays, replied :

"If he meant by that that all women are sensitive, he was indeed an old greenhorn. He ought

to have seen Fagette; he would soon have discovered whether it was easy to get anything out of her in the domain—how did he express it?—of physical and moral sensibility."

And she added with gentle pride:

"Don't you make any mistake, Robert, there's not such a heap of women like myself."

As he was drawing her into his arms, she released herself.

"You are hindering me."

Sitting down and doubling herself up in order to undo her boots, she continued:

"Do you know, Dr. Socrates told me the other day that he had seen an apparition. He saw a donkey-boy who had murdered a little girl. I dreamt of the story last night, only in my dream I could not make out whether the donkey-boy was a man or a woman. What a mix-up the dream was! Talking of Dr. Socrates, just guess whose lover he is—why, the lady who keeps the circulating library in the Rue Mazarine. She is no longer very young, but she is very intelligent. Do you think he is faithful to her? I'll take off my stockings, it's more becoming."

And she went on to tell him a story of the theatre:

"I really don't think I shall remain at the Odéon much longer."

"Why?"

"You'll see. Pradel said to me to-day, before rehearsal: 'My dear little Nanteuil, there has never been anything between us. It is ridiculous.' He was extremely decorous, but he gave me to understand that we were in a false position with regard to one another, which could not go on indefinitely. You must know that Pradel has established a rule. Formerly he used to pick and choose among his *pensionnaires*. He had favourites, and that caused an outcry. Nowadays, for the better administration of the theatre, he takes them all, even those he has no liking for, even those who are distasteful to him. There are no more favourites. Everything goes splendidly. Ah, he's a director all through, is Pradel!"

As Robert, in the bed, listened in silence, she went up to him and shook him:

"Then it's all the same to you if I carry on with Pradel?"

"No, my dear, it would not be all the same to me. But nothing I might say would prevent it."

Bending over him, she caressed him ardently, pretending to threaten and to punish him; and she cried:

"Then you don't really love me, that you are not jealous. I insist that you shall be jealous."

Then, suddenly, she moved away from him, and

hitching over her left shoulder her chemise, which had slipped down under her right breast, she loitered in front of the dressing-table and inquired uneasily :

"Robert, you have not brought anything here from the other room ? "

"Nothing."

Thereupon, softly, timidly, she slipped into the bed. But hardly had she lain down when she raised herself from the pillow on her elbow, and, craning her neck, listened with parted lips. It seemed to her that she could hear slight sounds of footsteps along the gravel path which she had heard in the house in the Boulevard de Villiers. She ran to the window ; she saw the Judas tree, the lawn, the garden gate. Knowing what she was yet to see, she sought to hide her face in her hands, but she could not raise her arms, and Chevalier's face rose up before her.

CHAPTER XIII

HE had returned home in a burning fever. Robert, after dining *en famille*, had retired to his attic. His nerves were on edge, and he was badly out of temper as a result of the manner in which Nanteuil had left him.

His shirt and his clothes, laid out on the bed by his valet, seemed to be waiting for him in a domestic and obsequious attitude. He began to dress himself with a somewhat ill-tempered alacrity. He was impatient to leave the house. He opened his round window, listened to the murmur of the city, and saw above the roofs the glow which rose into the sky from the city of Paris. He scented from afar all the amorous flesh gathered, on this winter's night, in the theatres and the great *cabarets*, the café-concerts and the bars.

Irritated by Félicie's denial of his desires, he had decided to satisfy them elsewhere, and as he was not conscious of any preference he believed that his only difficulty would be to make a choice; but he presently realized that he had no desire for any

of the women of his acquaintance, nor did he even feel any desire for an unknown woman. He closed his window, and seated himself before the fire.

It was a coke fire ; Madame de Ligny, who wore cloaks costing a thousand pounds, was wont to economize in the matter of her table and her fires. She would not allow wood to be burned in her house.

He reflected upon his own affairs, to which he had so far given little or no thought ; upon the career he had embraced, and which he beheld obscurely before him. The Minister was a great friend of his family. A mountaineer of the Cévennes, brought up on chestnuts, his dazzled eyes blinked at the flower-bedecked tables of Paris. He was too shrewd and too wily not to retain his advantage over the old aristocracy, which welcomed him to its bosom : the advantage of harsh caprices and arrogant refusals. Ligny knew him, and expected no favours at his hands. In this respect he was more perspicacious than his mother, who credited herself with a certain power over the dark, hairy little man, whom every Thursday she engulfed in her majestic skirts on the way from the drawing-room to the dinner-table. He judged him to be disobliging. And then something had gone wrong between them. Robert, as ill luck would have it, had forestalled his Minister in his intimacy with a

lady whom the latter loved to the verge of absurdity: Madame de Neuilles, a woman of easy virtue. And it seemed to him that the hairy little man suspected it, and regarded him with an unfriendly eye. And, lastly, the idea had grown upon him at the Quai d'Orsay that Ministers are neither able nor willing to do very much. But he did not exaggerate matters, and thought it quite possible that he might obtain a minor secretaryship. Such had been his wish hitherto. He was most anxious not to leave Paris. His mother, on the contrary, would have preferred that he should be sent to The Hague, where a post as third secretary was vacant. Now, of a sudden, he decided in favour of The Hague. "I'll go," he said. "The sooner the better." Having made up his mind, he reviewed his reasons. In the first place, it would be an excellent thing for his future career. Again, The Hague post was a pleasant one. A friend of his, who had held it, had enlarged upon the delightful hypocrisy of the sleepy little capital, where everything was engineered and "wangled" for the comfort of the Diplomatic Corps. He reflected, also, that The Hague was the august cradle of a new international law, and finally went so far as to invoke the argument that he would be giving pleasure to his mother. After which he realized that he wanted to leave home solely on account of Félicie.

His thoughts of her were not benevolent. He knew her to be mendacious, timorous, and a malicious friend. He had proof that she was given to falling in love with actors of the lowest type, or, at all events, that she made shift with them. He was not certain that she did not deceive him, not that he had discovered anything suspect in the life which she was leading, but because he was properly distrustful of all women. He conjured up in his mind all the evil that he knew of her, and persuaded himself that she was a little jade, and, being conscious that he loved her, he believed that he loved her merely because of her extreme prettiness. This reason seemed to him a sound one; but on analysing it he perceived that it explained nothing; that he loved the girl not because she was exceedingly pretty, but because she was pretty in a certain uncommon fashion of her own; that he loved her for that which was incomparable and rare in her; because, in a word, she was a wonderful thing of art and voluptuousness, a living gem of priceless value. Thereupon, realizing how weak he was, he wept, mourning over his lost freedom, his captive mind, his disordered soul, the devotion of his very flesh and blood to a weak, perfidious little creature.

He had scorched his eyes by gazing at the coke fire behind the bars of the grate. He closed them in pain and, under his closed eyes, he saw negroes

leaping before him in an obscene and bloody riot. While he sought to remember from what book of travel, read in boyhood, these blacks emerged, he saw them diminish, resolve themselves into imperceptible specks, and disappear into a red Africa, which little by little came to represent the wound seen by the light of a match on the night of the suicide. He reflected :

" That fool of a Chevalier ! Why, I was scarcely thinking of the fellow ! "

Suddenly, against this background of blood and flame, appeared the slender form of Félicie, and he felt lurking within him a hot, cruel desire.

CHAPTER XIV

HE went to see her the following day, in the little flat in the Boulevard Saint-Michel. He was not in the habit of going thither. He did not particularly care to meet Madame Nanteuil; she bored him and embarrassed him, although she was extremely polite to him, even to obsequiousness.

It was she who received him in the little drawing-room. She thanked him for his interest in Félicie's health, and informed him that she had been restless and unwell the night before, but was now feeling better.

"She is in her bedroom, working at her part. I will tell her that you are here. She will be very glad to see you, Monsieur de Ligny. She knows that you are very fond of her. And true friends are rare, especially in the theatrical world."

Robert observed Madame Nanteuil with an attention which he had not hitherto bestowed upon her. He was trying to see in her face the face that would be her daughter's in years to come. When

walking in the street he was fond of reading, in the faces of the mothers, the love-affairs of the daughters. And on this occasion he assiduously deciphered the features and the figure of this woman as an interesting prophecy. He discovered nothing either of bad or good augury. Madame Nanteuil, plump, fresh-complexioned, cool-skinned, was not unattractive with the sensuous fullness of her contours. But her daughter did not in the least resemble her.

Seeing her so collected and serene, he said to her :

"You yourself are not of a nervous temperament ?"

"I have never been nervous. My daughter does not take after me. She is the living image of her father. He was delicate, although his health was not bad. He died of a fall from his horse. You'll take a cup of tea, won't you, Monsieur de Ligny ?"

Félicie entered the room. Her hair was outspread upon her shoulders ; she was wrapped in a white woollen dressing-gown, held very loosely at the waist by a heavy embroidered girdle, and she shuffled along in red slippers ; she looked a mere child. The friend of the house, Tony Meyer, the picture dealer, was wont when he saw her in this garment, which was a trifle monkish in appearance,

to call her Brother Ange de Charolais, because he had discovered in her a resemblance to a portrait by Nattier which represented Mademoiselle de Charolais in the Franciscan habit. Before this little girl, Robert was surprised and silent.

"It's kind of you," she said, "to have come to inquire after me. I am better, thank you."

"She works very hard; she works too hard," said Madame Nanteuil. "Her part in *La Grille* is tiring her."

"Oh no, mother."

They spoke of the theatre, and the conversation languished.

During a moment's silence, Madame Nanteuil asked Monsieur de Ligny if he were still collecting old fashion-prints.

Félicie and Robert looked at her without understanding. They had told her not long before some fiction about engraved fashion-plates, to explain the meetings which they had not been able to conceal. But they had quite forgotten the fact. Since then, a piece of the moon, as an old author has said, had fallen into their love; Madame Nanteuil alone, in her profound respect for fiction, remembered it.

"My daughter told me you had a great number of those old engravings and that she used to find ideas for her costumes in them."

"Quite so, madame, quite so."

"Come here, Monsieur de Ligny," said Félicie. "I want to show you a design for a costume for the part of Cécile de Rochemaure."

And she carried him off to her room.

It was a small room hung with flowered paper; the furniture consisted of a wardrobe with a mirror, a couple of chairs upholstered in horsehair, and an iron bedstead, with a white counterpane; above it was a bowl for holy water, and a sprig of boxwood.

She gave him a long kiss on the mouth.

"I do love you, do you know!"

"Quite sure?"

"Oh yes! And you?"

"I too, I love you. I wouldn't have believed that I could love you so!"

"Then it came afterwards."

"It always comes afterwards."

"That's true, what you've just said, Robert. Before—one doesn't know."

She shook her head.

"I was very ill yesterday."

"Have you seen Trublet? What did he say?"

"He told me that I needed rest, and quiet. My darling, we must be sensible for another fortnight. Do you mind?"

"I do."

"So do I. But what would you have?"

He strolled round the room two or three times, looking into every corner. She watched him with some little uneasiness, dreading lest he should ask her questions about her poor jewels and her cheap trinkets, which were modest enough as presents, but she could not in every case explain how she came to receive them. One may say anything one pleases, of course, but one may contradict oneself, and get into trouble, and that assuredly is not worth while. She diverted his attention.

"Robert, open my glove-box."

"What have you got in your glove-box?"

"The violets you gave me the first time. Darling, don't leave me! Don't go away. When I think that from one day to the next you may go to some foreign country, to London, to Constantinople, I feel crazy."

He comforted her, telling her that there had been some thought of sending him to The Hague. But he was determined not to go; he would get himself attached to the Minister's staff.

"You promise?"

He gave the promise in all sincerity. And she became quite cheerful.

Pointing to the little wardrobe with its looking-glass, she said:

"Look, darling, it's there that I study my part. When you came, I was working over my scene in

the fourth. I take advantage of being alone to try for the exact tone. I seek a broad, mellow effect. If I were to listen to Romilly I should mince my words, and the result would be wretched. I have to say: 'I do not fear you.' It's the great moment of the part. Do you know how Romilly would have me say: 'I do not fear you'? I'll show you. I am to raise my hand to my nose, open my fingers and speak one word to each finger separately, in a particular tone, with a special expression: 'I, do, not, fear, you,' as if I were exhibiting marionettes! It's a wonder he does not ask me to put a little paper hat on every finger. Subtle, intellectual, isn't it?"

Then, lifting her hair and uncovering her animated features, she said:

"I'll show you how I do it."

Suddenly transfigured, seeming of greater stature, she spoke the words with an air of ingenuous dignity and serene innocence:

"No, sir, I do not fear you. Why should I fear you? You thought to ensnare me, and you have placed yourself at my mercy. You are a man of honour. Now that I am under the shelter of your roof, you shall tell me what you told Chevalier d'Amberre, your enemy, when he entered that gate. You shall tell me: 'You are in your own house; I am yours to command.'"

She had the mysterious gift of changing her

soul and her very face. Ligny was under the spell of this beautiful illusion.

"You are marvellous!"

"Listen, pussy-cat. I shall wear a big lawn bonnet with lappets, one above the other, on either side of my face. You see, in the play I am a young girl of the Revolution. And it is imperative that I should make people feel it. I must have the Revolution *in* me, do you understand?"

"Are you well up in the Revolution?"

"Of course I am! I don't know the dates, to be sure. But I have the feeling of the period. For me, the Revolution means a bosom swelling with pride under a crossed neckerchief, knees enjoying full freedom in a striped petticoat, and a tiny blaze of colour on the cheek-bones. There you have it!"

He asked her questions about the play, and he realized that she knew nothing about it. She did not need to know anything about it. She divined, she found by instinct all that she needed from it.

"At rehearsals, I never give them a hint as to any of my effects. I keep them all for the public. It will make Romilly tear his hair. How stupid they'll all look! Fagette, my dear, will make herself ill over it."

She sat down on a little rickety chair. Her forehead, but a moment before as white as marble,

was rosy; she had once more assumed her cheeky flapper's expression.

He drew near to her, gazed into the fascinating grey of her eyes, and, as on the evening before, when he sat in front of his coke-fire, he reflected that she was untruthful and cowardly, and ill-natured toward her friends; but now the thought was tempered with indulgence. He reflected that she had love-affairs with actors of the lowest type, or that she at least made shift with them; but the thought was tempered with a gentle pity. He recalled all the evil that he knew of her, but without bitterness. He felt that he loved her, less because she was pretty than because she was pretty in her own fashion; in a word, that he loved her because she was a gem endowed with life, and an incomparable thing of art and voluptuousness. He looked into the fascinating grey of her eyes, into their pupils, where tiny astrological symbols seemed to float in a luminous tide. He gazed at her with a gaze so searching that she felt it pierce right through her. And, assured that he had seen right into her, she said to him, with her eyes on his, clasping his head between her two hands:

"Oh yes! I'm a rotten little actress; but I love you, and I don't care a rap for money. And there aren't many as good as me. And you know it well enough."

CHAPTER XV

HEY met daily at the theatre, and they went for walks together.

Nanteuil was playing almost every night, and was eagerly working at her part of Cécile. She was gradually recovering her peace of mind ; her nights were less disturbed ; she no longer made her mother hold her hand while she fell asleep and no longer found herself suffocating in nightmares. A fortnight went by in this fashion. Then, one morning, while sitting at her dressing-table, combing her hair, she bent her head toward the glass, as the weather was overcast, and she saw in it, not her own face, but the face of the dead man. A thread of blood was trickling from one corner of his mouth ; he was smiling and gazing at her.

Thereupon she decided to do what she thought would be the proper and efficacious thing. She took a cab and drove off to see him. Going down the Boulevard Saint-Michel she bought a bunch of roses at her florist's. She took them to him. She went down on her knees before the tiny

black cross which marked the spot where they had laid him. She spoke to him, she begged him to be reasonable, to leave her in peace. She asked his forgiveness for having treated him formerly with harshness. People did not always understand one another in life. But now he ought to understand and forgive her. What good did it do to him to torment her? She asked no better than to retain a kindly memory of him. She would come and see him from time to time. But he must cease to persecute and frighten her.

She sought to flatter and soothe him with gentle phrases.

"I can understand that you wanted to revenge yourself. It was natural. But you are not wicked at heart. Don't be angry any more. Don't frighten me any more. Don't come to see me any more. I'll come to you; I'll come often. I'll bring you flowers."

She longed to deceive him, to soothe him with lying promises, to say to him: "Stay where you are; do not be restless any longer; stay where you are, and I swear to you that I will never again do anything to offend you; I promise to submit to your will." But she dared not lie over a grave, and she was sure that it would be useless, that the dead know everything.

A little wearied, she continued awhile, more

indolently, her prayers and supplications, and she realized that she no longer felt the horror with which the tombs had formerly inspired her ; that she had no fear of the dead man. She sought the reason for this, and discovered that he did not frighten her because he was not there.

And she mused :

" He is not there ; he is never there ; he is everywhere except where they laid him. He is in the streets, in the houses, in the rooms."

And she rose to her feet in despair, feeling sure that henceforth she would meet him everywhere except in the cemetery.

CHAPTER XVI

FTER a fortnight's patience Ligny urged her to resume their former intercourse. The period which she herself had fixed had elapsed. He would not wait any longer. She suffered as much as he did in refusing herself to him. But she dreaded to see the dead man return. She found lame excuses for postponing appointments; at last she confessed that she was afraid. He despised her for displaying so little common sense and courage. He no longer felt that she loved him, and he spoke harshly to her, but he pursued her incessantly with his desire.

Bitter days and barren hours followed. As she no longer dared to seek the shelter of a roof in his company, they used to take a cab, and after driving for hours about the outskirts of the city they would alight in some gloomy avenue, wandering far down it under the bitter east wind, walking swiftly, as though chastised by the breath of an unseen wrath.

Once, however, the weather was so mild that it filled them with its soft languor. Side by side they

trod the deserted paths of the Bois de Boulogne. The buds, which were beginning to swell on the tips of the slender black branches, dyed the tree-tops violet under the rosy sky. To their left stretched the fields, dotted with clumps of leafless trees, and the houses of Auteuil were visible. Slowly driven coupés, with their elderly passengers, crawled along the road, and the wet-nurses pushed their perambulators. A motor-car broke the silence of the Bois with its humming.

"Do you like those machines?" asked Félicie.

"I find them convenient, that's all."

It was true that he was no chauffeur. He had no taste for any kind of sport; he concerned himself only with women.

Pointing to a cab which had just passed them, she exclaimed:

"Robert, did you see?"

"No."

"Jeanne Perrin was in it with a woman."

And, as he displayed a calm indifference, she added in a reproachful tone:

"You are like Dr. Socrates. Do you think that sort of thing natural?"

The lake slept, bright and serene, within its sombre walls of pines. They took the path to their right, which skirted the bank where the white geese and swans were preening their feathers. At their

approach a flotilla of ducks, like living hulls, their necks curving like prows, set sail toward them.

Félicie told them, in a regretful tone, that she had nothing to give them.

"When I was little," she went on to say, "Papa used to take me out on Sundays to feed the animals. It was my reward for having learned my lessons well all the week. Papa used to delight in the country. He was fond of dogs, horses, all animals in fact. He was very gentle and very clever. He used to work very hard. But life is difficult for an officer who has no money of his own. It grieved him sorely not to be able to do as the wealthy officers did, and then he didn't hit it off with Mamma. Papa's life was not a happy one. He was often wretched. He didn't talk much; but we two understood one another without speaking. He was very fond of me. Robert, dearest, later on, in the distant future, the very distant future, I shall have a tiny house in the country. And when you come there, my beloved, you will find me in a short skirt, throwing corn to my fowls."

He asked her what gave her the idea of going on the stage.

"I knew very well that I'd never find a husband, since I had no dowry. And from what I saw of my older girl friends, working at dress-making or in a telegraph office, I was not encouraged to follow in

their steps. When I was quite a little girl I thought it would be nice to be an actress. I had once acted, at my boarding-school, in a little play, on St. Nicholas' Day. I thought it no end of a lark. The schoolmistress said I didn't act well, but that was because Mamma owed her for a whole term. From the time I was fifteen I began to think seriously about going on the stage. I entered the Conservatoire. I worked, I worked very hard. It's a back-breaking trade. But success brings rest."

Opposite the chalet on the island they found the ferry-boat moored to the landing. Ligny jumped into it, pulling Félicie after him.

"Those tall trees are lovely, even without leaves," she said. "But I thought the chalet was closed at this time of the year."

The ferryman told them that, on fine winter days, people out for a walk liked to visit the island, because they could enjoy quiet there, and that he had only just ferried a couple of ladies across.

A waiter, who was living amid the solitude of the island, brought them tea, in a rustic sitting-room, furnished with a couple of chairs, a table, a piano, and a sofa. The panelling was mildewed, the planks of the flooring had started. Félicie looked out of the window at the lawn and the tall trees.

"What is that," she asked, "that big dark ball on the poplar?"

"That's mistletoe, my pet."

"One would think it was an animal rolled round the branch, gnawing at it. It isn't nice to look at."

She rested her head on her lover's shoulder, saying in a languid tone:

"I love you."

He drew her down upon the sofa. She felt him, kneeling at her feet, his hands, clumsy with impatience, gliding over her, and she suffered his attempts, inert, discouraged, foreseeing that it was useless. Her ears were ringing like a little bell. The ringing ceased, and she heard, on her right, a strange, clear, glacial voice say: "I forbid you to belong to one another." It seemed to her that the voice spoke from above, in the glow of light, but she did not dare to turn her head. It was an unfamiliar voice. Involuntarily and despite herself she tried to remember his voice, and she realized that she had forgotten its sound, and that she could never again remember it. The thought came to her: "Perhaps this is the voice he has now." Terrified, she swiftly pushed her skirt over her knees. But she refrained from crying out, and she did not speak of what she had just heard, lest she should be taken for a madwoman, and because she realized somehow that it was not real.

Ligny drew away from her.

"If you don't want anything more to do with me, say so honestly. I am not going to take you by force."

Sitting upright, with her knees pressed together, she told him :

"Whenever we are in a crowd, as long as there are people about us, I want you, I long for you ; but as soon as we are by ourselves I am afraid."

He replied by a cheap, spiteful sneer :

"Ah, if you must have a public to stimulate you ! "

She rose, and returned to the window. A tear was running down her cheek. She wept for some time in silence. Suddenly she called to him :

"Look there ! "

She pointed to Jeanne Perrin, who was strolling on the lawn with a young woman. Each had an arm about the other's waist ; they were giving one another violets to smell, and were smiling.

"See ! That woman is happy ; her mind at peace."

And Jeanne Perrin, tasting the peace of long-established habits, strolled along satisfied and serene, without even betraying any pride in her strange preference.

Félicie watched her with an interest which she did not confess to herself, and envied her her serenity.

"She's not afraid, that woman."

"Let her be! What harm is she doing us?"

And he caught her violently by the waist. She freed herself with a shudder. In the end, disappointed, frustrated, humiliated, he lost his temper, called her a silly fool, and swore that he would not stand her ridiculous way of treating him any longer.

She made no reply, and once more she began to weep.

Angered by her tears, he told her harshly:

"Since you can no longer give me what I ask you, it is useless for us to meet any more. There is nothing more to be said between us. Besides, I see that you have ceased to love me. And you would admit, if for once you could speak the truth, that you have never loved anyone except that wretched second-rate actor."

Then her anger exploded, and she moaned in despair:

"Liar! Liar! That's an abominable thing to say. You see I'm crying, and you want to make me suffer more. You take advantage of the fact that I love you to make me miserable. It's cowardly. Well, no then, I don't love you any longer. Go away! I don't want to see you again. Go! But it's true—what are we doing like this? Are we going to spend our lives staring at each

other like this, wild with each other, full of despair and rage? It is not my fault—I can't, I can't. Forgive me, darling, I love you, I worship you, I want you. Only drive him away. You are a man, you know what there is to do. Drive him away. You killed him, not I. It was you. Kill him altogether then—Oh God, I am going mad. I am going mad!"

. . . . . .

On the following day, Ligny applied to be sent as Third Secretary to The Hague. He was appointed a week later, and left at once, without having seen Félicie again.

CHAPTER XVII

ADAME NANTEUIL thought of nothing but her daughter's welfare. Her liaison with Tony Meyer, the picture-dealer in the Rue de Clichy, left her with plenty of leisure and an unoccupied heart. She met at the theatre a Monsieur Bondois, a manufacturer of electrical apparatus ; he was still young, superior to his trade, and extremely well-mannered. He was blessed with an amorous temperament and a bashful nature, and, as young and beautiful women frightened him, he had accustomed himself to desiring only women who were not young and beautiful. Madame Nanteuil was still a very pleasing woman. But one night when she was badly dressed, and did not look her best, he made her the offer of his affections. She accepted him as something of a help toward housekeeping, and so that her daughter should want for nothing. Her devotion brought her happiness. Monsieur Bondois loved her, and courted her most ardently. At the outset this surprised her ; then it brought her happiness and peace of mind ; it

seemed to her natural and good to be loved, and she could not believe that her time for love was past when she was in receipt of proof to the contrary.

She had always displayed a kindly disposition, an easy-going character, and an even temper. But never yet had she revealed in her home so happy a spirit and such gracious thoughtfulness. Kind to others, and to herself, always preserving, in the lapse of changeful hours, the smile that disclosed her beautiful teeth and brought the dimples into her plump cheeks, grateful to life for what it was giving her, blooming, expanding, overflowing, she was the joy and the youth of the house.

While Madame Nanteuil conceived and gave expression to bright and cheerful ideas, Félicie was fast becoming gloomy, fretful, and sullen. Lines began to show in her pretty face ; her voice assumed a grating quality. She had at once realized the position which Monsieur Bondois occupied in the household, and, whether she would have preferred her mother to live and breathe for her alone, whether her filial piety suffered because she was forced to respect her less, whether she envied her happiness, or whether she merely felt the distress which love affairs cause us when we are brought into too close contact with them, Félicie, more especially at meal-times, and every day, bitterly

reproached Madame Nanteuil, in very pointed allusions, and in terms which were not precisely veiled, in respect of this new "friend of the family"; and for Monsieur Bondois himself, whenever she met him, she exhibited an expressive disgust and an unconcealed aversion. Madame Nanteuil was only moderately distressed by this, and she excused her daughter by reflecting that the young girl had as yet no experience of life. And Monsieur Bondois, whom Félicie inspired with a superhuman terror, strove to placate her by signs of respect and inconsiderable presents.

She was violent because she was suffering. The letters which she received from The Hague inflamed her love, so that it was a pain to her. A prey to consuming visions, she was pining away. When she saw her absent friend too clearly her temples throbbed, her heart beat violently, and a dense increasing shadow would darken her mind. All the sensibility of her nerves, all the warmth of her blood, all the forces of her being flowed through her, sinking downwards, merging themselves in desire in the very depths of her flesh. At such times she had no other thought than to recover Ligny. It was Ligny that she wanted, only Ligny, and she herself was surprised at the disgust which she felt for all other men. For her instincts had not always been so exclusive. She told herself that

she would go at once to Bondois, ask him for money, and take the train for The Hague. And she did not do it. What deterred her was not so much the idea of displeasing her lover, who would have looked upon such a journey as bad form, as the vague fear of awakening the slumbering shadow.

That she had not seen since Ligny's departure. But perturbing things were happening, within her and around her. In the street she was followed by a water-spaniel, which appeared and vanished suddenly. One morning when she was in bed her mother told her: "I am going to the dress-maker's," and went out. Two or three minutes later Félicie saw her come back into the room as if she had forgotten something. But the apparition advanced without a look at her, without a word, without a sound, and disappeared as it touched the bed.

She had even more disturbing illusions. One Sunday, she was acting, in a matinée of *Athalie*, the part of young Zacharias. As she had very pretty legs she found the disguise not displeasing; she was glad also to show that she knew how verse should be spoken. But she noticed that in the orchestra stalls there was a priest wearing his cassock. It was not the first time that an ecclesiastic had been present at an afternoon performance

of this tragedy drawn from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it impressed her disagreeably. When she went on the stage she distinctly saw Louise Dalle, wearing the turban of Jehoshabeath, loading a revolver in front of the prompter's box. She had enough common sense and presence of mind to reject this absurd vision, which disappeared. But she spoke her first lines in an inaudible voice.

She had burning pains in the stomach. She suffered from fits of suffocation ; sometimes, without apparent cause, an unspeakable agony gripped her bowels, her heart beat madly and she feared that she must be dying.

Dr. Trublet attended her with watchful prudence. She often saw him at the theatre, and occasionally went to consult him at his old house in the Rue de Seine. She did not go through the waiting-room ; the servant would show her at once into the little dining-room, where Arab potteries glinted in the shadows, and she was always the first to be shown in. One day Socrates succeeded in making her understand the manner in which images are formed in the brain, and how these images do not always correspond with external objects, or, at any rate, do not always correspond exactly.

"Hallucinations," he added, "are more often than not merely false perceptions. One sees a thing, but one sees it badly, so that a feather-broom

becomes a head of bristling locks, a red carnation is a beast's open mouth, and a chemise is a ghost in its winding-sheet. Insignificant errors."

From these arguments she derived sufficient strength to despise and dispel her visions of cats and dogs, or of persons who were living, and well known to her. Yet she dreaded seeing the dead man again ; and the mystic terrors nestling in the obscure crannies of her brain were more powerful than the demonstrations of science. It was useless to tell her that the dead never returned ; she knew very well that they did.

On this occasion Socrates once more advised her to find some distraction, to visit her friends, and by preference the more pleasant of her friends, and to avoid darkness and solitude, as her two most treacherous enemies.

And he added this prescription :

" Especially must you avoid persons and things which may be connected with the object of your visions."

He did not see that this was impossible. Nor did Nanteuil.

" Then you will cure me, dear old Socrates," she said, turning upon him her pretty grey eyes, full of entreaty.

" You will cure yourself, my child. You will cure yourself, because you are hard-working,

sensible, and courageous. Yes, yes, you are timid and brave at the same time. You dread danger, but you have the courage to live. You will be cured, because you are not in sympathy with evil and suffering. You will be cured because you want to be cured."

"You think then that one can be cured if one wills it?"

"When one wills it in a certain profound, intimate fashion, when it is our cells that will it within us, when it is our unconscious self that wills it; when one wills it with the secret, abounding, absolute will of the sturdy tree that wills itself to grow green again in the spring."

CHAPTER XVIII

HAT same night, being unable to sleep, she turned over in her bed, and threw back the bed-clothes. She felt that sleep was still far off, that it would come with the first rays, full of dancing atoms of dust, with which morning pierces the chinks between the curtains. The night-light, with its tiny burning heart shining through its porcelain shade, gave her a mystic and familiar companionship. Félicie opened her eyes and at a glance drank in the white milky glimmer which brought her peace of mind. Then, closing them once more, she relapsed into the tumultuous weariness of insomnia. Now and again a few words of her part recurred to her memory, words to which she attached no meaning, yet which obsessed her: "Our days are what we make them." And her mind wearied itself by turning over and over some four or five ideas.

"I must go to Madame Royaumont to-morrow, to try on my gown. Yesterday I went with Fagette to Jeanne Perrin's dressing-room; she was dressing,

and she showed her hairy legs, as if she was proud of them. She's not ugly, Jeanne Perrin; indeed, she has a fine head; but it is her expression that I dislike. How does Madame Colbert make out that I owe her thirty-two francs? Fourteen and three are seventeen, and nine, twenty-six. I owe her only twenty-six francs. 'Our days are what we make them.' How hot I feel!"

With one swift movement of her supple loins she turned over, and her bare arms opened to embrace the air as though it had been a cool, subtle body.

"It seems a hundred years since Robert went away. It was cruel of him to leave me alone. I am sick with longing for him." And curled up in her bed, she recollected intently the hours when they held each other in a close embrace. She called him:

"My pussy-cat! Little wolf!"

And immediately the same train of thoughts began once more their fatiguing procession through her mind.

"'Our days are what we make them. Our days are what we make them. Our days . . .' Fourteen and three, seventeen, and nine, twenty-six. I could see quite plainly that Jeanne Perrin showed her long man's legs, dark with hair, on purpose. Is it true what they say, that Jeanne Perrin gives money

to women? I must try my gown on at four o'clock to-morrow. There's one dreadful thing, Madame Royaumont never can put in the sleeves properly. How hot I am! Socrates is a good doctor. But he does sometimes amuse himself by making you feel a stupid fool."

Suddenly she thought of Chevalier, and she seemed to feel an influence emanating from him which was gliding along the walls of her bedroom. It seemed to her that the glimmer of the night-light was dimmed by it. It was less than a shadow, and it filled her with alarm. The idea suddenly flashed through her mind that this subtle thing had its origin in the portraits of the dead man. She had not kept any of them in her bedroom. But there were still some in the flat, some that she had not torn up. She carefully reckoned them up, and discovered that there must still be three left: the first, when he was quite young, showed him against a cloudy background; another, laughing and at his ease, sitting astride of a chair; a third as Don Cæsar de Bazan. In her hurry to destroy every vestige of them she sprang out of bed, lit a candle, and in her nightgown shuffled along in her slippers into the drawing-room, until she came to the rosewood table, surmounted by a phœnix palm. She pulled up the tablecloth and searched through the drawer. It contained card-counters, sockets for candles, a

few scraps of wood detached from the furniture, two or three lustres belonging to the chandelier and a few photographs, among which she found only one of Chevalier, the earliest, showing him standing against a cloudy background.

She searched for the other two in a little piece of Boule furniture which adorned the space between the windows, and on which were some Chinese lamps. Here slumbered lamp-globes of ground glass, lamp-shades, cut-glass goblets ornamented with gilt bronze, a match-stand in painted porcelain flanked by a child sleeping against a drum beside a dog, books whose bindings were detached, tattered musical scores, a couple of broken fans, a flute, and a small heap of carte-de-visite portraits. There she discovered a second Chevalier, the Don Cæsar de Bazan. The third was not there. She asked herself in vain where it could have been hidden away. Fruitlessly she hunted through boxes, bowls, flower-pot holders, and the music davenport. And while she was eagerly searching for the portrait, it was growing in size and distinctness in her imagination, attaining to a man's stature, was assuming a mocking air and defying her. Her head was on fire, her feet were like ice, and she could feel terror creeping into the pit of her stomach. Just as she was about to give up the search, about to go and bury her face in her pillow, she remembered that

her mother kept some photographs in her mirror-panelled wardrobe. She again took courage. Softly she entered the room of the sleeping Madame Nanteuil. With silent steps she crept over to the wardrobe, opened it slowly and noiselessly, and, standing on a chair, explored the top shelf, which was loaded with old cardboard boxes. She came upon an album which dated from the Second Empire, and which had not been opened for twenty years. She rummaged among a mass of letters, of bundles of receipts and Mont-de-Piété vouchers. Awakened by the light of the candle and by the mouse-like noise made by the seeker, Madame Nanteuil demanded:

"Who is there?"

Immediately, perceiving the familiar little phantom in her long nightgown, with a heavy plait of hair down her back, perched on a chair, she exclaimed:

"It's you, Félicie? You are not ill, are you? What are you doing there?"

"I am looking for something."

"In my wardrobe?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Will you kindly go back to your bed! You will catch cold. Tell me at least what you are looking for. If it's the chocolate, it is on the middle shelf next to the silver sugar-basin."

But Félicie had seized upon a packet of photographs, which she was rapidly turning over. Her impatient fingers rejected Madame Doulce, bedecked with lace; Fagette, radiant, her hair dissolving in its own brilliance; Tony Meyer, with close-set eyes and a nose drooping over his lips; Pradel, with his flourishing beard; Trublet, bald and snub-nosed; Monsieur Bondois, with timorous eye and straight nose set above a heavy moustache. Although not in a mood to bestow any attention upon Monsieur Bondois, she gave him a passing glance of hostility, and by chance let a drop of candle-grease disfigure his nose.

Madame Nanteuil, who was now wide awake, could make nothing of her proceedings.

"Félicie, why on earth are you poking about in my wardrobe like that?"

Félicie, who at last held the photograph for which she had sought so assiduously, responded only by a cry of fierce delight and flew from the chair, taking with her her dead friend, and, inadvertently, Monsieur Bondois as well.

Returning to the drawing-room she crouched down by the fireplace, and made a fire of paper, into which she cast Chevalier's three photographs. She watched them blazing, and when the three bits of cardboard, twisted and blackened, had flown up the chimney, and neither shape nor substance was

left, she breathed freely. She really believed, this time, that she had deprived the jealous dead man of the material of his apparitions, and had freed herself from the dreaded obsession.

On picking up her candlestick she saw Monsieur Bondois, whose nose had disappeared beneath a round blob of white wax. Not knowing what to do with him she threw him with a laugh into the still flaming grate.

Returning to her room she stood before the looking-glass and drew her nightgown closely about her, in order to emphasize the lines of her body. A thought which occasionally flitted through her mind tarried there this time a little longer than usual.

She was wont to ask herself:

"Why is one made like that, with a head, arms, legs, hands, feet, chest, and abdomen? Why is one made like that and not otherwise? It's funny."

And at the moment the human form seemed to her arbitrary, fantastic, alien. But her astonishment was soon over. And, as she looked at herself, she felt pleased with herself. She was conscious of a keen deep-seated delight in herself. She bared her breasts, held them delicately in the hollow of her hands, looked at them tenderly in the glass, as if they were not a part of herself, but something

belonging to her, like two living creatures, like a pair of doves.

After smiling upon them, she went back to bed. Waking late in the morning she felt surprised for a moment at being alone in her bed. Sometimes, in a dream, she would divide herself into two beings, and, feeling her own flesh, she would dream that she was being caressed by a woman.

CHAPTER XIX

HE dress rehearsal of *La Grille* was called for two o'clock. As early as one o'clock Dr. Trublet had taken his accustomed place in Nanteuil's dressing-room.

Félicie, who was being dressed by Madame Michon, reproached her doctor with having nothing to say to her. Yet it was she who, preoccupied, her mind concentrated upon the part which she was about to play, was not listening to him. She gave orders that nobody should be allowed to come into her dressing-room. For all that, she received Constantin Marc's visit with pleasure, for she found him sympathetic.

He was getting excited. In order to conceal his agitation he made a pretence of talking about his woods in the Vivarais, and began to tell shooting stories and peasants' tales, which he did not finish.

"I am in a funk," said Nanteuil. "And you, Monsieur Marc, don't you feel qualms in the stomach?"

He denied feeling any anxiety. She insisted:

"Now confess that you wish it were all over."

"Well, since you insist, perhaps I would rather it were over."

Whereupon Dr. Socrates, with a simple expression and in a quiet voice, asked him the following question :

"Do you not believe that what must be accomplished has already been accomplished, and has been accomplished from all time ?"

And without waiting for a reply he added :

"If the world's phenomena reach our consciousness in succession, we must not conclude from that that they are really successive, and we have still fewer reasons to believe that they are produced at the moment when we perceive them."

"That's obvious," said Constantin Marc, who had not listened.

"The universe," continued the doctor, "appears to us perpetually imperfect, and we are all under the illusion that it is perpetually completing itself. Since we perceive phenomena successively, we actually believe that they follow one another. We imagine that those which we no longer see are in the past, and those which we do not yet see are in the future. But it is possible to conceive beings built in such fashion that they perceive simultaneously what we regard as the past and the future. We may conceive beings who perceive phenomena in a retrograde

order, and see them unroll themselves from our future to our past. Animals disposing of space otherwise than ourselves, and able, for instance, to move at a speed greater than that of light, would conceive an idea of the succession of phenomena which would differ greatly from our own."

"If only Durville is not going to rag me on the stage!" exclaimed Félicie, while Madame Michon was putting on her stockings under her skirt.

Constantin Marc assured her that Durville did not even dream of any such thing, and begged her not to be uneasy.

And Dr. Socrates resumed his discourse.

"We ourselves, of a clear night, when we gaze at Spica Virginis, which is throbbing above the top of a poplar, can see at one and the same time that which was and that which is. And it may be said with equal truth that we see that which is and that which will be. For if the star, such as it appears to us, represents the past as compared with the tree, the tree constitutes the future as compared with the star. Yet the star, which, from afar, shows us its tiny, fiery countenance, not as it is to-day, but as it was in the time of our youth, perhaps even before our birth, and the poplar-tree, whose young leaves are trembling in the fresh night air, come together within us in the same moment of time, and to us are present simultaneously. We say of a thing that

it is in the present when we have a precise perception of it. We say that it is in the past when we preserve but an indistinct image of it. A thing may have been accomplished millions of years ago, yet if it makes the strongest possible impression upon us it will not be for us a thing of the past; it will be present. The order in which things revolve in the depths of the universe is unknown to us. We know only the order of our perceptions. To believe that the future does not exist, because we do not know it, is like believing that a book is not finished because we have not finished reading it."

The doctor paused for a moment. And Nanteuil, in the silence which followed, heard the sound of her heart beating. She exclaimed:

"Continue, my dear Socrates, continue, I beg you. If you only knew how much good you do me by talking! You think that I am not listening to a word you say. But it distracts me to hear you talking of far-away things; it makes me feel that there is something else besides my entrance; it prevents me from giving way to the blues. Talk about anything you like, but do not stop."

The wise Socrates, who had doubtless anticipated the benign influence which his speech was exerting over the actress, resumed his lecture:

"The universe is constructed inevitably as a triangle of which two angles and one side are given.

Future things are determined. They are from that moment finished. They are as if they existed. Indeed, they exist already. They exist to such a degree that we know them in part. And, if that part is infinitesimal in proportion to their immensity, it is none the less very appreciable in proportion to the part of accomplished things of which we can have any knowledge. It is permissible to say that, for us, the future is not much more obscure than the past. We know that generations will follow generations in labour, joy and suffering. I look beyond the duration of the human race. I see the constellations slowly changing in the heavens those forms of theirs which seem immutable; I see the Wain unharnessed from its ancient team, the shield of Orion broken in twain, Sirius extinguished. We know that the sun will rise to-morrow and that for a long time to come it will rise every morning amid the dense clouds or in light mists."

Adolphe Meunier entered discreetly on tiptoe.

The doctor grasped his hand warmly.

"Good day, Monsieur Meunier. We can see next month's new moon. We do not see her as distinctly as to-night's new moon, because we do not know in what grey or ruddy sky she will reveal her old saucepan-lid over my roof, amid the stove-flues capped with pointed hats and romantic hoods, to the gaze of the amorous cats. But this coming rising

of the moon—if we were expert enough to know it in advance, in its most minute particulars, every one of which is essential, we should conceive as clear an idea of the night whereof I speak as of the night now with us ; both would be equally present to us.

"The knowledge that we have of the facts is the sole reason which leads us to believe in their reality. We know that certain facts are bound to occur. We must therefore believe them to be real. And, if they are real, they are realized. It is therefore credible, my dear Constantin Marc, that your play has been played a thousand years ago, or half an hour ago, which comes absolutely to the same thing. It is credible that we have all been dead for some time past. Think it, and your mind will be at rest."

Constantin Marc, who had paid scant attention to his remarks and who did not perceive their relevance or their propriety, answered, in a somewhat irritable tone, that all that was to be found in Bossuet.

"In Bossuet!" exclaimed the indignant physician. "I challenge you to show me anything resembling it in his works. Bossuet knew nothing of philosophy."

Nanteuil turned to the doctor. She was wearing a big lawn bonnet with a tall round coif ; it was bound tightly upon her head with a wide blue ribbon,

and its lappets, one above another, fell on either side of her face, shading her forehead and cheeks. She had transformed herself into a fiery blonde. Reddish-brown hair fell in curls about her shoulders. An organdie neckerchief was crossed over her bosom and held at the waist by a broad purple girdle. Her white and pink striped petticoat, which flowed as though wet and clinging from the somewhat high waist, made her appear very tall. She looked like a figure in a dream.

"Delage, too," she said, "rags one in the most rotten way. Have you heard what he did to Marie-Claire? They were playing together in *Les Femmes savantes*. He put an egg into her hand, on the stage. She couldn't get rid of it until the end of the act."

On hearing the call boy's summons she went downstairs, followed by Constantin Marc. They heard the roar of the house, the mutterings of the monster, and it seemed to them that they were entering into the flaming mouth of the apocalyptic beast.

La Grille was favourably received. Coming at the end of the season, with little hope of a long run, it found favour with all. By the middle of the first act the public were conscious of the style, the poetry, and, here and there, the obscurities of the play. Thenceforward they respected it, pretended to enjoy

it, and wished they could understand it. They forgave the play its slight dramatic value. It was literary, and for once the style found acceptance.

Constantin Marc as yet knew no one in Paris. He had invited to the theatre three or four landed proprietors from the Vivarais, who sat blushing in the stalls in their white ties, rolled their round eyes, and did not dare to applaud. As he had no friends nobody dreamt of spoiling his success. And even in the corridors there were those who set his talent above that of other dramatists. Greatly excited, nevertheless, he wandered from dressing-room to dressing-room or collapsed into a chair at the back of the director's stage-box. He was worrying about the critics.

"Set your mind at rest," Romilly told him. "They will say of your play the good or bad things they think of Pradel. And for the time being they think more ill than good of him."

Adolphe Meunier informed him, with a pale smile, that the house was a good one, and that the critics thought the play showed very careful writing. He expected, in return, a few complimentary words concerning his *Pandolphe et Clarimonde*. But it did not enter Constantin Marc's head to vouchsafe them.

Romilly shook his head.

"We must look forward to slatings. Monsieur

Meunier knows it well. The press has shown itself ferociously unjust to him."

"Alas," sighed Meunier, "they will never say as many hard things about us as were said of Shakespeare and Molière."

Nanteuil had a great success, which was marked less by vociferous calls before the curtain than by the deeper and more discreet approval of discriminating playgoers. She had revealed qualities with which she had not hitherto been credited; purity of diction, nobility of pose, and a proud, modest grace.

On the stage, during the last interval, the Minister congratulated her in person. This was a sign that the public was favourably disposed, for Ministers never express individual opinions. Behind the Grand Master of the University pressed a flattering crowd of public officials, society folk, and dramatic authors. With arms extended toward her like pump-handles they all simultaneously assured her of their admiration. And Madame Doulce, stifled by their numbers, left on the buttons of the men's garments shreds of her countless adornments of cotton lace.

The last act was Nanteuil's triumph. She obtained better things from the public than tears and shouts. She won from all eyes that moist yet tearless gaze, from every breast that deep yet almost

silent murmur, which beauty alone has power to compel.

She felt that she had grown immeasurably in a single instant, and when the curtain fell she whispered :

"This time I've done it!"

She was unrobing herself in her dressing-room, which was filled with baskets of orchids, bouquets of roses, and bunches of lilac, when a telegram was brought to her. She tore it open. It was a message from The Hague containing these words :

"My heartfelt congratulations on your undoubted success—ROBERT."

Just as she finished reading it Dr. Trublet entered the dressing-room.

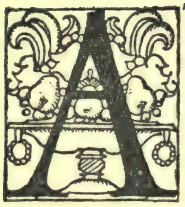
She flung her arms, burning with joy and fatigue, round his neck ; she drew him to her warm moist bosom, and planted on his meditative Silenus-like face a smacking kiss from her intoxicated lips.

Socrates, who was a wise man, took the kiss as a gift from the gods, knowing full well that it was not intended for him, but was dedicated to glory and to love.

Nanteuil realized herself that in her intoxication she had perhaps charged her lips with too ardent a breath, for, throwing her arms apart, she exclaimed :

"It can't be helped ! I am so happy!"

CHAPTER XX



T Easter an event of great importance increased her joy. She was engaged at the Comédie-Française. For some time past, without mentioning the subject, she had been trying for this engagement. Her mother had helped her in the steps she had taken. Madame Nanteuil was lovable now that she was loved. She now wore straight corsets and petticoats that she could display anywhere. She frequented the offices of the Ministry, and it is said that, being solicited by the deputy-chief of a department in the Beaux-Arts, she had yielded with very good grace. At least, so Pradel said.

He would exclaim joyfully :

"You wouldn't recognize her now, Mother Nanteuil ! She has become most desirable, and I like her better than her little vixen of a daughter. She has a better disposition."

Like the rest of them, Félicie had disdained, despised, disparaged the Comédie-Française. She had said, as all the others did : "I should hardly

care to get into that house." And no sooner did she belong to it than she was filled with proud and joyful exultation. What increased her pleasure twofold was that she was to make her debut in *L'École des Femmes*. She was already studying the part of Agnès with an obscure old professor, Monsieur Maxime, of whom she thought highly because he was acquainted with all the traditions of the stage. At night she was playing Cécile in *La Grille*, and she was living in a feverish turmoil of work when she received a letter in which Robert de Ligny informed her that he was returning to Paris.

During his stay at The Hague he had made certain experiments which had proved to him the strength of his love for Félicie. He had had women who were reported to be pretty and pleasing. But neither Madame Boumdernoot of Brussels, tall and fresh looking, nor the sisters Van Cruysen, milliners on the Vijver, nor Suzette Berger of the Folies-Marigny, then on tour through Northern Europe, had given him a sense of pleasure in its completeness. When in their company he had regretted Félicie, and had discovered that, of all women, he desired her alone. Had it not been for Madame Bourmdernoot, the sisters Van Cruysen, and Suzette Berger, he would never have known how priceless Félicie Nanteuil was to

him. If one must be literal it may be argued that he was unfaithful to her. That is the correct expression. There are others which come to the same thing and which are not such good form. But if one looks into the matter more closely he had not deceived her. He had sought her, he had sought her out of herself and had learned that he would find her in herself alone. In his futile wisdom he was almost angered and alarmed; he was uneasy at having to stake the multitude of his desires upon so slender a substance, in so unique and fragile a vessel. And he loved Félicie all the more because he loved her with a certain depth of rage and hatred.

On the very day of his arrival in Paris he made an appointment with her in a bachelor's flat, which a rich colleague in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had placed at his disposal. It was situated in the Avenue de l'Alma, on the ground-floor of an attractive-looking house, and consisted of a couple of small rooms hung with a design of suns with brown hearts and golden rays, which rose, uniform, peaceful, and shadowless on the cheerful wall. The rooms were modern in style; the furniture was of a pale green, decorated with flowering branches; its outlines followed the gentle curves of the liliaceous plants, and assumed something of the tender feeling of moist vegetation.

The cheval-glass leant slightly forward in its frame of bulbous plants of supple form, terminating in closed corollas, and in this frame the mirror had the coolness of water. A white bearskin lay stretched at the foot of the bed.

"You! You! It's you!" was all she could say.

She saw the pupils of his eyes shining and heavy with desire, and while she gazed at him a cloud gathered before her eyes. The subtle fire of her blood, the burning of her loins, the warm breath of her lungs, the fiery ardour of her face, were all blended in her mouth, and she pressed on her lover's lips a long, long kiss, a kiss pregnant with all these fires and as fresh as a flower in the dew.

They asked one another twenty things at a time, and their questions intermingled.

"Were you wretched, Robert, when you were away from me?"

"So you are making your début at the Comédie?"

"Is The Hague a pretty place?"

"Yes, a quiet little town. Red, grey, yellow houses, with stepped gables, green shutters, and geraniums at the windows."

"What did you do there?"

"Not much. I walked round the Vijver."

"You did not go with women, I should hope?"

"No, upon my word. How pretty you are, my darling! Are you well again now?"

"Yes, I am cured."

And in sudden entreaty she said:

"Robert, I love you. Do not leave me. If you were to leave me I know for certain I could never take another lover. And what would become of me? You know that I can't do without love."

He replied brusquely, in a harsh voice, that he loved her only too well, that he thought of nothing but of her.

"I'm going crazy with it."

His harshness delighted and reassured her better than the nerveless tenderness of oaths and promises could have done. She smiled and began to undress herself generously.

"When do you make your début at the Comédie?"

"This very month."

She opened her little bag, and took from it, together with her face-powder, her call for the rehearsal, which she held out to Robert. It was a source of unending delight to her to gaze admiringly at this document, because it bore the heading of the Comédie, with the remote and awe-inspiring date of its foundation.

"You see, I make my début as Agnès in *L'École des Femmes*."

"It's a fine part."

"I believe you."

And, while she was undressing, the lines surged to her lips, and she whispered them :

"Moi, j'ai blessé quelqu'un ? fis-je tout étonnée.
Oui, dit-elle, blessé ; mais blessé tout de bon ;
Et c'est l'homme qu'hier vous vîtes au balcon.
Las ! qui pourrait, lui dis-je, en avoir été cause ?
Sur lui, sans y penser, fis-je choir quelque chose ?"

"You see, I have not grown thin."

"Non, dit-elle, vos yeux ont fait ce coup fatal,
Et c'est de leurs regards qu'est venu tout son mal."

"If anything, I am a little plumper, but not too much."

"Hé, mon Dieu ! ma surprise est, fis-je, sans seconde ;
Mes yeux ont-ils du mal pour en donner au monde ?"

He listened to the lines with pleasure. If on the one hand he did not know much more of the literature of bygone days or of French tradition than his youthful contemporaries, he had more taste and more lively interests. And, like all Frenchmen, he loved Molière, understood him, and felt him profoundly.

"It's delightful," he said. "Now, come to me."

She let her chemise slip downwards with a calm and beneficent grace. But, because she wished to make herself desired, and because she loved comedy, she began Agnès' narrative :

" J'étais sur le balcon à travailler au frais,
Lorsque je vis passer sous les arbres d'auprès
Un jeune homme bien fait qui, rencontrant ma vue. . . ."

He called her, and drew her to him. She glided from his arms, and, advancing toward the mirror, she continued to recite and act before the glass :

" D'une humble révérence aussitôt me salue."

Bending her knee, at first slightly, then lower, then, with her left leg brought forward, and her right thrown back, she curtsied deeply.

" Moi, pour ne point manquer à la civilité,
Je fis la révérence aussi de mon côté. . . ."

He called her more urgently. But she dropped a second curtsy, the pauses of which she accentuated with amusing precision. And she went on reciting and dropping curtsies at the places indicated by the text and by the traditions of the stage.

" Soudain il me refait une autre révérence ;
Moi, j'en refais de même une autre en diligence ;
Et lui, d'une troisième aussitôt repartant,
D'une troisième aussi j'y repars à l'instant. . . ."

She executed every detail of stage business,

seriously and conscientiously, taking pains to give a perfect rendering. Her poses, some of which were disconcerting, requiring as they did a skirt to explain them, were almost all pretty, while all were interesting, inasmuch as they brought into relief the firm muscles under the soft envelope of a young body, and revealed at every movement correspondences and harmonies which are not commonly observed.

When clothing her nudity with the propriety of her attitudes and the ingenuousness of her expressions she was the incarnation, through mere chance and caprice, of a gem of art, an allegory of Innocence in the style of Allegrain or Clodion. And the great lines of the comedy rang out with delicious purity from this animated figurine. Robert, enthralled in spite of himself, suffered her to go on to the very end. What entertained him above all was that the most public of all things, a stage scene, should be presented to him in so private and secret a fashion. And, while watching the ceremonious actions of this girl in all her nudity, he was at the same time revelling in the philosophical pleasure of discovering how dignity is produced in the best social circles.

"Il passe, vient, repasse et toujours de plus belle
Me fait à chaque fois une révérence nouvelle ;
Et moi qui tous ses tours fixement regardais,
Nouvelle révérence aussi je lui rendais. . . ."

In the meantime she admired in the mirror her freshly-budded breasts, her supple waist, her arms, a trifle slender, round and tapering, and her smooth, beautiful knees; and, seeing all this subservient to the fine art of comedy, she became animated and exalted; a slight flush, like rouge, tinted her cheeks.

"Tant que si sur ce point la nuit ne fût venue,
Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue,
Ne voulant point céder, ni recevoir l'ennui
Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui. . . ."

He called to her from the bed, where he was lying on his elbow:

"Now come!"

Whereupon, full of animation and with heightened colour, she exclaimed:

"Don't you think that I, too, love you!"

She flung herself beside her lover. Supple and wholly surrendered, she threw back her head, offering to his kisses her eyes veiled with shadowy lashes and her half-parted lips, from which gleamed a moist flash of white.

Of a sudden she started to her knees. Her staring eyes were filled with unspeakable terror. A hoarse scream escaped from her throat, followed by a wail as long drawn out and gentle as an organ note. Turning her head, she pointed to the white fur spread out at the foot of the bed.

"There! There! He is lying there like a crouching dog, with a hole in his head. He is looking at me, with the blood trickling from the corner of his mouth."

Her eyes, wide open, rolled up, showing the whites. Her body stretched backward like a bow, and, when it had recovered its suppleness, she fell as if dead.

He bathed her temples with cold water, and brought her back to consciousness. In a childlike voice she whimpered that every joint in her body was broken. Feeling a burning sensation in the hollow of her hand, she looked, and saw that the palm was cut and bleeding.

She said:

"It's my nails, they've gone into my hand. See, my nails are full of blood!"

She thanked him tenderly for his ministrations, and apologized sweetly for causing him so much trouble.

"It was not for that you came, was it?"

She tried to smile, and looked around her.

"It's nice, here."

Her gaze met the call to rehearsal lying open on the bedside table, and she sighed:

"What is the use of my being a great actress if I am not happy?"

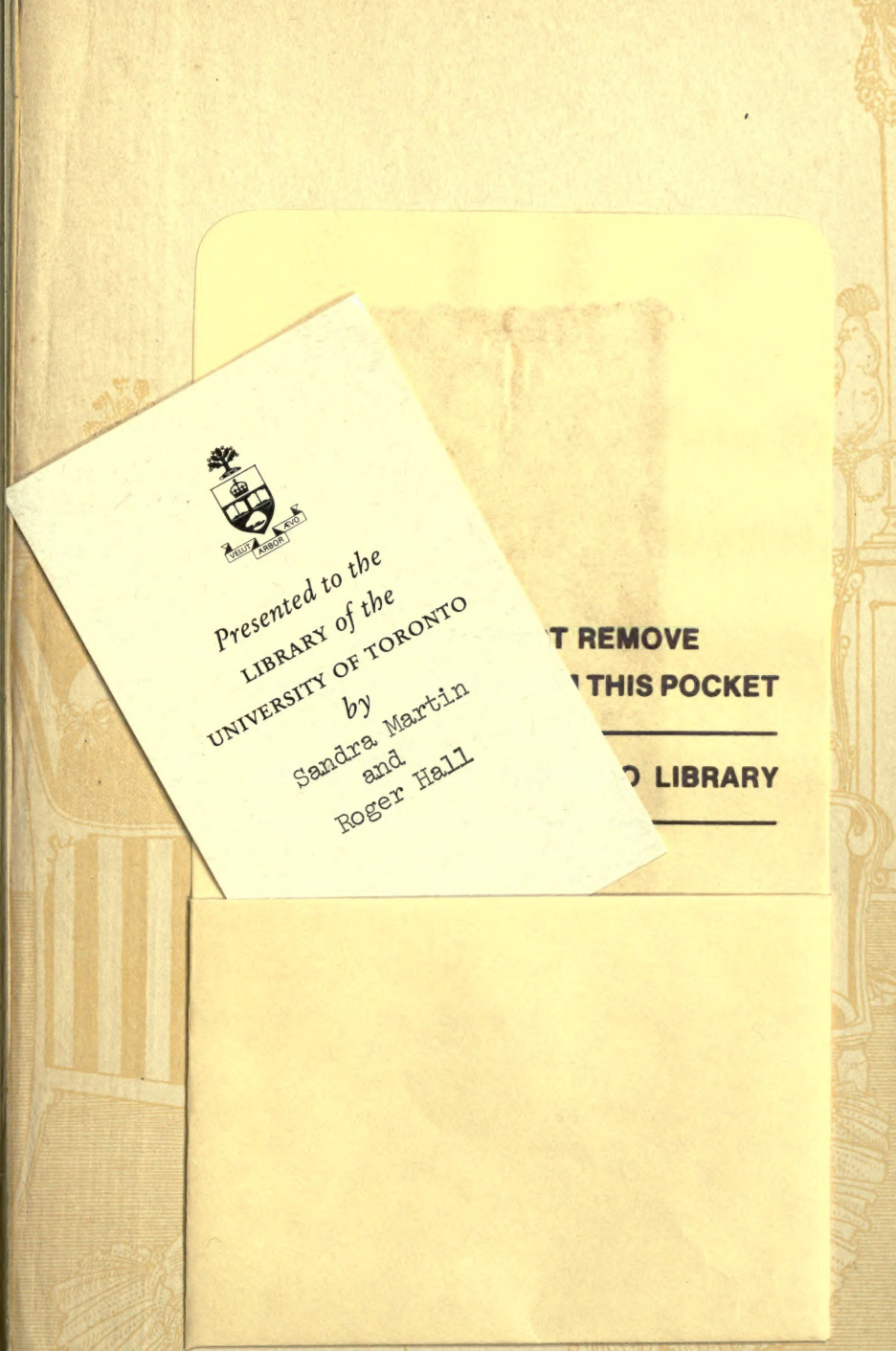
Without realizing it, she was repeating word

for word what Chevalier had said when she rejected his advances.

Then, raising her still stupefied head from the pillow in which it had lain buried, she turned her mournful eyes toward her lover, and said to him resignedly :

"We did indeed love each other, we two. It is over. We shall never again belong to each other ; no, never. He forbids it ! "

THE END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